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Fanfiction as Playable Media

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Fanfiction as Playable Media

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Fanfiction as Playable Media

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This dissertation offers one way to reconcile what can sometimes seem like an increasingly wide division between text-based and more consciously multimodal composition practices in digital environments. Drawing on Lev Manovich's theory of digital production, I demonstrate that fanfiction replicates the material structures that produce it: the internet. In this model, a fandom's canon knowledge is a database, and fanfiction is the interface through which we approach the canon. I continue by examining the virtual linking mechanisms that ground fanfiction reading and writing practices. While the hyperlinked structure of internet environments is frequently considered destabilizing, I argue the conceptual hyperlinks that ground fanfiction are navigational structures that allow for and require significantly different literacy practices than reading and creating traditional literary works such as novels. Instead, these works operate more like aural and visual compositions. Fanfiction is grounded in invention, memory, and arrangement, viewing all texts not as content to be absorbed, but as material that can be connected to other ideas and transformed into something else. These texts emerge from ongoing conversations, relying on extant context from both creator and audience while

simultaneously adding new layers of context and conversation. Finally, I position fanfiction as a useful part of new media rhetoric and composition pedagogical practices. In looking at fanfiction as an inherently rhetorical genre, my dissertation differs from existing conversations on fandom and new media writing, which often center on fanfiction as a form of feminist rebellion, and digital writing as either remix writing or decentered and destabilized texts. Countering the common assumption that fanfiction is derivative or childish, my dissertation proves it creates readers and writers who can easily shift perspectives, think carefully about their audience, and critically analyze social narratives. Although fanfiction draws upon long traditions of storytelling, its persistent concern with its own medium separates it from other genres. Fanfiction is a kind of storytelling that is always pointing to something outside of itself, to its source texts and its own materiality. In this way, it creates, in textual form, a dynamic representation of process-based understanding and composition.

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Glossary

Like any field of study fanfiction has its own specialized languages and genre rules. I'm reluctant to say these are common definitions, because fannish language changes dramatically and quickly. But some terms have remained steady for some time, and these may at least mark a moment in fannish language use. Please note that this list does not begin to be exhaustive, but merely includes specialized language that appears directly in this dissertation.[1] So although I'll be describing some of these in the chapters that follow, the following terms are offered as a brief reference:

!: The exclamation point, or bang. In computer programing, the ! is often used as a negation, for example "!A" means "not A." In fanfiction, the ! indicates a divergence from canon. "Amnesia!fic" means that the fic will use amnesia, not in the canon, as a trope. While still in use, this marker is beginning to fade from general practice, perhaps because fandoms are moving further away from what might have earlier been known as "computer culture" as less and less technical knowledge is required to create and transmit works.

Aca-fans: alternatively, aca-fen. This is generally a self-identifying marker. Henry Jenkins, for example, identifies as an aca-fan. Other scholars reject the term, in part because of its strong association with ethnographic research.

[1] Sheenagh Pugh's *The Democratic Genre* (2005) does an excellent job explaining many long-standing fannish terms.

Alternate Universe: Usually abbreviated as AU. This is a kind of fic which the characters in one canon are moved into an alternate universe version of themselves. Many kinds of AUs are standard tropes and/or sub genres in fic. For example, you are guaranteed to find a coffee shop AU for every fandom.

Alphabetic Text: Text that is in letter form, such as you are reading now. This is sometimes used to differentiate letter-based texts from aural or visual texts.

Beta-reader: A beta reader acts as a general editor for fic. They can sometimes, but not always, have specific roles, such as a Brit-pick person, who would look for things like kerb vs. curb and cultural artifacts, like what sort of gifts one generally brings to a hospitalized friend; a spelling and grammar person (often abbreviated SPAG); or a cheerleader, whose job is to encourage the creator of a fic.

Bodyswap: When characters swap bodies; character A is now in character B's body.

Canon: the source material used for fanfiction, which can range from a specific book or picture to entire franchises or mythologies.

Crossover: When the characters of one fandom appear in another. For example, the characters of *Supernatural* suddenly find themselves at Howgwarts. The difference between crossovers and fusions is that in crossovers the characters will retain all of their own canon's characteristics and feelings, while in fusions, the characters are likely to be melded into the another canon's universe norms.

Curtain!fic: Fanfiction that focuses on domesticity and home building.

Fanworks: these include all fannish creations, including but not limited to fanart, fanmixes, podfic, and so on. Note that all of these, like fanfiction, are closed rather than open (e.g., fan art) throughout this dissertation, because that is the way they're used in my own fannish community.

Fanfiction: The practice of using previously developed characters and/or universes, making up new stories for them, and writing those stories down. Also known simply as fic. I'll be using the two terms interchangeably, if only because this is how they are used in my own fannish communities. Fan fiction (two words) has been out of favor for some time.

Five Things/Five Times: according to Fanlore, "a writing form or structure that requires a set of multiple scenes that are related to each other in some way without being in the same chronological timeline." (Np)

Flat Text: I use this term to differentiate non-linking alphabetic based texts from linking texts.

Fusion: when two fandoms are used to create a fic. For example, in Chapter One, *Harry Potter* and *Sherlock* canons are combined.

Genderswap: When a character is a different gender than in canon. Related terms: Genderfuck, where gender roles are examined and played with by characters, and Alwaysa!x, where in the fic's universe, the character has always been another gender than they are in canon. This differs than genderswap, which often involves magic. See also: Rule 63.

Gen: a fic in which a romantic relationship is not the primary focus.

Mary Sue (fic): and its male corollary, Gary Stue. A particular kind of self-insert fic in which the main character is the hero, exceptional in many ways, and often a stand-in for the author. Widely derided for decades, Mary Sue fics have recently begun to be defended as both a normal part of literature (especially young adult and children's literature), and particularly as a feminist practice -the bildungsroman is widely accepted, particularly for boys, but less so for girls. For defense of Mary Sue fic see: http://feministfiction.com/2013/09/17/we-need-more-mary-sues/ and http://astridv.livejournal.com/187934.html (which contains helpful links).

Meta: related to "metadiscourse," meta is a fannish term for non-fiction discussion and inquiry into canon, fanon, and/or fannish practices.

NPC: Non-player characters. These are characters in video games that interact with the player's character. Some of these will be only in the background, and some will be primary and secondary relationships for the player's character.

Podfic: fanfiction, read aloud. A transformative work in its own right.

PWP: Plot What Plot or Porn Without Plot. The focus of a fic is on intimate sexual contact between characters, with little attention paid to their relationship outside of sex.

RPF: Real People Fic. Fic about (usually) famous people. For example, RPF about Elijah Wood, actor, rather than Frodo Baggins, the hobbit character Wood plays in the *Lord of the Rings* movie franchise.

Slash: a non-canonical homosexual relationship between characters. This is one of the most commonly-known fanfiction terms outside of fandom, but it is becoming less

frequently used within fandom itself, in part because it is such an expected aspect of the genre.

The One Where: a common beginning for summaries of fic, especially in recommendation posts.

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Introduction

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, Rhetoric and Composition scholars have made various calls for researching and teaching texts that are more democratic, more connected to students, and can make more feminist use of technology in the classroom. Our computers and writing community, in particular, "has had an agenda: the need to develop a view of how computers could help writing teachers move toward better, more just, and more equitable writing classrooms and, by extension to a better, more just, and more equitable system of education" (Hawisher, et al 2). This was true when it was written, looking back from 1994 to 1979, and it is just as true now. Since then we have been looking for – and finding -materials and pedagogies that allow us to privilege the theories we espouse; the kinds of work that allows us to develop writing and reading strategies that privilege process over product, that let us focus on the idea of development while acknowledging our histories, and that help us move these ideas outside the classroom.

Part of this work has resulted in a long study of digital texts from hypertext fiction to games to newsreels to video games to films to what we've broadly called "remix" texts, those texts that take pieces of each other and create new stories and sounds with special resonance for the audience. For the last several years, however, the expansion of rhetoric and composition research into audio and visual forms has led to alphabetic being largely excluded. Even when we've wondered about the ways in which we can incorporate digital work more completely into our own professionalization processes, we have turned to mixed media rather than alphabetic texts. Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence* (2011) points to *The Grey Album* as representative of the mash up, and

asks how we can incorporate the idea of being curators, remixers, or *bricoleurs* into professional tenure requirements.

> If we come to accept remix as a form of scholarly authorship, a form of academic *bricolage*, how will the relationship between the *bricoleur* and the texts he or she uses be understood? And what kind of relationship will be assumed to exist between the *bricoleur* and the products of his or her work? (80)

These questions are still present, in part because in looking to audio and visual models, we are making less of a direct comparison than we would if we looked toward digital alphabetic texts.

There are many reasons why alphabetic texts have not been included in our recent inquiries into these questions, but in rhetoric and composition there are three primary concerns that have led to this exclusion: the idea that text on a screen directly replicates the work of a text on a page and so doesn't require intensive study, the idea that non hyper-linked texts in particular cannot be a part of a remix culture, and the concern regarding plagiarism. In this dissertation, I take each of these in turn to argue that alphabetic texts are a key part of digital rhetoric and composition, and that the field would be improved by including a kind of writing called fanfiction.

Fanfiction can roughly be defined as the practice of transforming previously published characters, universes, and stories and into new variations and iterations. As is immediately evident, this practice has a long history. Certainly Homer and Virgil, drawing on their pantheons of gods and long histories of stories, were operating in

fanfiction-like genres. William Shakespeare famously based his plays on the works of others, reflecting the attitudes toward ownership and texts of his time. In literary circles, novels such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* might be considered fanfiction. These kinds of works, enjoyable in their own right, are even more enjoyable when readers are familiar with the texts they are based on. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a powerful novel standing alone, but as a rebuttal to colonialism and as an extension of Charlotte Brontë's early feminism as shown in *Jane Eyre*, it is incisive criticism. Read alongside earlier texts like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and later works such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, it becomes part of a larger discourse on intersectional feminism. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is deliberately responding to one text's representation of a set of ideas and just as deliberately pushing conversations about those ideas forward, opening them up for further debate. I draw on Rhys' novel as an example because it is so singular in the English literary canon. The strength of the novel didn't inspire a shift in the genre, but it is widely considered to be an original work of critical fictional narrative. Arguably, it is a work of fiction that has rhetorical importance.

Fanfiction makes these same kinds of moves. As a genre, it responds to popular narratives, and not only to the particular stories it transforms, but to the ways those stories are told and the underlying themes those narratives and genres hold. This approach to storytelling can be viewed as an extension of the modern narrative as it was described by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*. There, Auerbach describes two kinds of storytelling, the Homeric and the Old Testament. Homeric storytelling, he says, is an external form of narrative in which nothing is left unexplained, the goal of which is "to

represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (6). We are told in great detail how and why Odysseus returns to Penelope, with which hand the goatherd opens a gate, and so forth. All of the character's motivations and actions are laid bare. Auerbach contrasts this form of narrative with the kind seen in the Old Testament, which develops suspense for the reader through assumptions about their background knowledge. In his reading of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, Auerbach says, quoting the Old King James version of the Bible:

> 'And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Behold, here I am.' Even this opening startles us when we come to it from Homer. Where are the two speakers? We are not told. The reader, however, knows that they are not normally to be found together in one place on earth, that one of them, God, in order to speak to Abraham, must come from somewhere, must enter the earthly realm from some unknown heights or depths. (8)

These gaps in information not only create suspense for the reader but the "suggested influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality" demand interpretation and allow for multiple meanings and ideas (23). Readers simply "know" that the God of the Old Testament doesn't typically wander around the desert. It is tempting to read fanfiction as an extension of this kind storytelling. After all, Rhys has taken the opportunities provided by the gaps in *Jane Eyre* to build a new interpretation of events. And in using the characters of Rochester, Jane, and Bertha, those figures stand in place not only for their

actions in *Wide Sargasso Sea* but also in *Jane Eyre*. The rhetorical significance of the novel emerges from the motion between the two representations. This is a very reader-oriented approach to a text, but instead of a text having no particular meaning at all, the ongoing re-versioning and creation of new iterations of texts structure of fanfiction induces readers to hold a multiplicity of meanings at once, to continually acknowledge the reality of other's interpretations.

Moreover, the Old Testament style of writing eventually led, Auerbach says, to the figural style of the New Testament, in which one character stands in for all of a type. In this kind of analysis, "the people and events of life on earth become a series of figures, signs pointing to nothing less than the entire history of salvation," with each figure becoming "both itself….and a sign outside of, and larger than, itself" (Hovind 259). In this instance, the motion between a character in a narrative and the ever-present larger context of the narrative itself becomes primary. The unnamed madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* becomes Bertha, and our reading of Gilbert and Gubar is developed through a 100-year old tradition of women's role in western culture. Read in this way, fanfiction offers an encapsulation of the ideals rhetoric and composition often put forward as grounding theories of the field– it is writing that is inextricably linked to the idea of process and critical inquiry into narratives, it requires significant effort by the reader, and is based on strong understandings of context, arrangement, and style.

It has been suggested that the discursive nature of fanfiction aligns it with folk and fairy tales, and/or with classic verse and mythological traditions (see, for example: Mafalda Stasi 2006, Rebecca Black 2008, Catherine Tosenberger 2010). And in many ways, fanfiction operates in a strongly oral tradition. Scholars from Walter Ong to

Richard Lanham to Jay David Bolter to George Landow and many others have commented on the ways in which computer-mediated discourse tends to reflect oral/aural language rather than traditional written texts. Because of its distinctly oral qualities, fanfiction encourages creativity and the adaptation of texts to particular contexts and audiences. Ong characterizes oral expression as primarily additive, rather than hierarchical, and says this additive feature of language lends itself to clusters of ideas, and therefore to archetypes and epithets. The redundancy of this type of language use is, he argues, very different than the sparse, linear qualities of written language, particularly of print. He says "Oral cultures encourage fluency, fulsomeness, volubility" and argues that an oral residue accounts for the highly "amplified" texts of the Middle Ages, which were a period of transition between oral and written storytelling (40). In fanfiction we see all of these qualities, but instead of a set of densely worded and lengthy tales and chapter headings, as is typical of early print genres, we see it in the multitude of stories in fandom, which cover every possible aspect of a character.

Similarly, Walter Benjamin's theory of the differences between storytelling and the novel agrees with Ong's theory of secondary orality, but he also reminds us that while novels are devoted to one story, one hero, stories are created through "*many* diffuse occurrences" (154). If we think about the stories and epic poems about the pantheons of Greek gods and goddesses, for example, we can see that the occurrences are not only about the multiple stories of a certain incarnation of a god – like Zeus- but they encompass many different of the incarnations or occurrences of a god, who may go by the same name and have certain of the same character traits no matter what situation he

encounters or what form he's in when he encounters. Zeus may be a bull in one occurrence and a swan in another, but he is still Zeus.

Fanfiction, with its multiple occurrences of each heroine or hero, reflects this kind of oral narrative sensibility. Buffy is Buffy, whether she's a blonde girl staking a bad vampire or if she's a penguin. Like the old myths, fanfiction insists upon readers that do not need closed endings, or completion, but rather requires and rewards infinite choice, infinite variation. Benjamin goes on to say that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories" (91), and this aspect of his theory is abundantly reflected in fanfiction. There are literally millions of stories of our incredibly fallible heroes and heroines, now Buffy and Sam and Dean[2] instead of Achilles and Athena, in multiple forms and occurrences being re-told on the internet. Through the frequent addresses to the reader, the often circuitous, repetitive, and episodic nature of stories, the creation of stories on demand for the reader that occurs, particularly in communities like kink memes, the reincarnation of myths and archetypes, and the reworking of old stories to meet new needs, the links between oral storytelling and the narratives produced through computer interactions have never been more clear than they are in fanfiction.

My work here is not to delineate what the genre rules are, or what "counts" as fanfiction, but to examine the material conditions that have created an enormous set of texts and critical practices that align closely with digital rhetoric and composition's goals. Fanfiction is a contrary genre. On its surface, many aspects of fanfiction appear to be lesser reflections of what is frequently called "good literature." Despite being online, they tend to use a strictly linear and non-hyperlinked mode to generate stories that revolve

[2] The heroine of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and heroes of *Supernatural*, both long-running horror genre television shows.

around specific tropes: the first-time romance, 5 times Character X did Y, and so on. Beyond that, they're sometimes intensely pornographic, which puts off some readers. And despite these seemingly terrible qualities, fanfiction is immensely popular, internationally and inter-generationally.

In part, this dissertation exists due to the current popularity of fanfiction. Over the last three decades, fic has moved from being a relatively private practice, shared only with the writer themselves or with a small community to being a significant part of popular culture. There are (literally) millions and millions of fanfiction texts online. Its enormous popularity has created a significant level of anxiety about writing, reading, copyright, and the individual genius - not to mention concerns about the moral compass of the authors - which appears periodically in more traditionally popular media like news articles, blogs, and letters to the editor bemoaning the fate of fiction in the modern age.

But fanfiction is tremendously creative, has its own rules and sub-genres, and reflects the complementary impulses of our time - the remix and the database. The arguments for these dual impulses have been made in multiple fields. Digital writing theorists like Stuart Selber, Paul Miller, and Adam Banks have written extensively and persuasively that we live in a remix culture while digital humanists such as N. Katherine Hayles, Alan Liu, and Lev Manovich have described the impact of technology on writing through the ways in which it shapes our relationship to the databases in which we hold our information and perspectives. Moreover, fanfiction is inherently rhetorical, inherently critical, and inherently based on transforming public discourses into personal and political discourses.

Because of these qualities, in this dissertation I begin to take on some of the arguments that have excluded fanfiction from rhetoric and composition instruction. In the first chapter I explain that fanfiction doesn't replicate a plain paper based story replicated on a screen, but requires a dramatically different kind of reading than, for example, the original works of fiction one can read through the Gutenberg Press. Instead, fanfiction is better read as a new media object. I draw on Lev Manovich's theories of the database/interface mechanisms of websites and suggest that reading fanfiction as a result of and through the material conditions of its production allows us to make room for it in digital rhetoric studies. This chapter describes in detail the primary structures of fanfiction, and further explains how it is different than the hypertext fiction that is more familiar to computers and writing scholars. While hypertext fiction draws on ideas of interrupted discourses and broken paths, fanfiction relies instead on a consistent linking structure, and it is this kind of linking that accounts for its current popularity and its real use for digital rhetoric.

This linking structure is what allows us to place fanfiction alongside texts like remixed music and other remix art forms. In the second chapter, I demonstrate that the literacies required by fanfiction are much closer to listening to dj-ed music than they are to more traditional print-based literacies. I then use video games to show that we have already included some forms of alphabetic storytelling in digital rhetoric and composition studies, and explain how fanfiction is a more complex version of the kinds of moves made in these aural and visual based writing practices.

The third chapter moves from the theoretical to the pragmatic, offering methods of including fanfiction in both short and long term projects for courses as well as answering

some of the questions and concerns that sometimes arise when teaching texts that are often viewed as being of dubious quality. I show that fanfiction can be usefully included as a bridge between traditional alphabetic texts and texts that are seen as more overtly multi-modal, and how it models many of the values rhetoric and composition have widely theorized, but have sometimes struggled to incorporate into our own composing and pedagogical practices. Drawing on the model of fanfiction's own practices, this chapter concludes by putting forward some of the questions opened up by the work of this dissertation. Like fanfiction, this text isn't trying to be a complete document, or the final word on its ideas; instead it is opening a door for more questions.

It goes almost without saying that the internet plays an important role in contemporary relationships to both information and storytelling, and that these two ideas are by now inextricably intertwined. Fanfiction is remix writing, remix storytelling, and it is extraordinarily popular. For example, *The Archive of Our Own*, a fanfiction archive holding only about 3,000,000 fanworks,[3] and regularly receives over 2.5 million hits a day, while HarryPotterFanFiction.net receives 50 million individual hits per month, just to name two semi-popular archives. Fanfiction lives online, on journaling sites like LiveJournal, Dreamwidth, innumerable personal websites and archives, on Twitter and Tumblr. Its impact on the reading and writing of students, and their ideas about reading and writing is hard to overstate, even as it remains something that is widely derided for its generic forms and (homo)sexually-oriented content. Neither traditional fiction like *Moby Dick* or the kind post-modernist text digital humanists consider exemplary, like *afternoon*, fanfiction recalls instead the dynamic structure of Dickens and the modernist

[3] Note: in 2013, there were only 450,000 works.

content of T.S. Eliot and says it is the property of every reader and writer. Fanfiction, then, forms a bridge between traditional and contemporary literacies.

Beyond the texts themselves, fanfiction forms another kind of bridge, one that spans the gap between public and private writing. It is in many ways "everyday writing," one that many fanfiction authors consider to be entirely different than the kind of work they might do for school, or in offline public discourse, because it *is* personal, it reflects the ethics and concerns of the author and their communities. An accomplished fanfiction reader/writer is the best kind of close reader, the most engaged with their texts, the most critical reader of society and culture. A fanfiction reader/writer is rhetorically inclined, is deeply imbued in very traditional inventive processes, is intensely literate in ways that are directly aligned with the core values of Rhetoric and English, and lives in a world of collaborative intellectual work online and off. As humanities departments continue to have to justify their relevance, fanfiction offers a bridge between old and new medias. As rhetoric and writing teachers, we can't afford to ignore a genre that emerges so directly from the intersection of technology, peer-education, narrative, and agency. Fanfiction offers a conceptual framework that answers the challenges of digital and multimedia writing.

A brief review of the literature

With the emergence of the world-wide phenomenon that is *Fifty Shades of Grey*, fanfiction is part of our everyday life and the subject of quite a bit of cultural reaction. Academic work, however, particularly from an English perspective, has been slightly more limited, and can more or less be sorted into three different generational viewpoints. Much of the first-generation scholarship emerges from a psychoanalytic framework and

was focused on fandom behavior and theory, rather than on fanfiction as texts. Henry Jenkins arguably started the field with the publication of *Textual Poachers* in 1992. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's theory of resistant practices, he posits that fans take only the parts of the canonical works that they enjoyed, and reject the rest, changing the stories to better suit their needs. As a media scholar, Jenkins was interested in discovering why so many middle-class white women were re-arranging the plots of their favorite televisions shows into what were generally homosexual romantic plotlines (7). Closely following Janice Radway's applications of Nancy Chodorow[4] and de Certeau, *Textual Poachers* shaped the conversation around fanfiction. His approach considered fans as consumers almost unconsciously working through their personal issues by resisting the official discourse of the texts. Significantly, he says, "Like the poachers of old*, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness*" (27, my emphasis). While his work is important, and the feminist argument he makes about fanfiction is still relevant, what is striking about Jenkin's study is that he went backward almost twenty years, into the late 1970s and early 1980s, trying to find a psychological source for fanfiction, when the technology of the early 1990s was already revolutionizing how fanfiction was produced and read.[5]

This reading of fanfiction also appears in Camille Bacon-Smith's influential *Enterprising Women* (1992), where she argues that women read and write fanfiction in

[4] Radway's own use of de Certeau appears more obviously in a later article "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problem of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects."

[5] Jenkins has continued to produce thoughtful and insightful work on fandoms throughout the last fifteen years, including several books and organizing conferences. His blog is www.henryjenkins.org. His twenty-one part series of interviews on fandoms and gender brings together many of the American scholars who are currently working on fandom communities.

order to "engage the masculine cultural model of active agent," so that they might "reinterpret the heroic figure in mass media in terms of a feminine culture model of emotional relatedness" (150). Cinda Gillian echoes this model again in her 1998 essay "War of the Worlds: Richard Chaves, Paul Ironhorse, and the Female Fan Community," saying women "create, consume, and mediate their activities apart from the dominant culture industry" (185). More recently, literacy scholars have taken an explicitly psychological approach to feminine resistance to a patriarchal culture in fanfiction, specifically seeking to discover the construction of child and adolescent identities through the fiction they create, with particular attention to the *Mary Sue* phenomenon, in which a character is a direct stand-in for the (usually young) female author (Thomas 2007, Black 2008).[6]

A movement toward studying fanfiction texts occurs in what we might imagine as a second generation of fan scholarship. Academic work that studies fanfiction from a text-based perspective has also frequently focused on the idea of resistance. Those that have focused on the linguistic aspects of fanfiction (see Dell 1998, Crafts 2007) have moved from de Certeau's resistance to the idea of the resistant carnival as developed in Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse and the Novel" as an integral part of fanfiction. This type of analysis usually focuses on the phrase, "a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language" (273). That is, the divergent voices and stories apparent in fanfiction are deliberately opposed to the discourses of popular culture. However, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006) contains several essays by and for

[6] While wildly popular and acceptable in children's fiction, insertion of a "Mary Sue" character into adult fanfiction will often result in scathing criticism by readers. This perception of Mary Sue fic as problematic is shifting as feminism begins to openly laud younger and younger children understanding the problems of heteronormativity.

fans, including essays on the palimpsestual nature of the texts (Stasi), considerations of fanfiction as another popular genre (Driscoll & Woledge) and explications of the common conventions of fanfiction (Kaplan). In a similar vein, in 2007 The Organization for Transformative Works was founded as an effort to create a safe, secure space for fan-created works to be archived. One of their projects, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, is a peer-reviewed journal that focuses on fans and fan productions. Now in its seventh year, the journal welcomes manuscripts on all aspects of transformative works. Especially notable on the subject of fic is the special issue on *Supernatural* (vol. 4, 2010), with "Kinda like the folklore of its day," by Catharine Tosenberger and "Let's get those Winchesters pregnant," by Berit Astrom, and the vol. 7, 2011 article "Taking a bite out of Buffy: Carnivalesque play and resistance in fanfiction" by Amanda Hodges and Laurel Richmond, which returns again to Bakhtin. Sheenagh Pugh's *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (2005) stands out for its careful description of fannish writing practices, and especially so for its attention to fannish writing pedagogies.

Internet Fictions, edited by Ingrid Holtz-Davies, Anton Kirchhofer, and Sirpa Leppanen (2009) is also representative of this move toward studying fanfiction as texts. There, Roberta Grandi describes a history of the fanfiction that surrounds Jane Austen's works from 1850 through the early 21st century, Daria Pimenova usefully describes fanfiction narrative structures as occupying a place between traditional narrative and game play, and Leppanen argues that fanfiction isn't novel or groundbreaking, but rather occupies a performative social sphere that allows participants to engage in "active semiotic work" (79) while gaining cultural capital. Finally, fanfiction is making a reappearance in composition journals as a part of the ongoing interest in remix culture

and writing. For example, "Remix Literacy and Fan Compositions,"(*Computers and Composition* 29.2 (2012), by Kyle Stedman, examines the composing practices of the RemixRedux LiveJournal community.

However, fanfiction is becoming more of a presence in popular culture with mixed results. The most popular (and most recent) of these is 2014's *fic*: *why fanfiction is taking over the world*, edited by English professor Anne Jamison. It includes essays on fannish history, meta, and interviews with both fanfiction authors and the celebrities they sometimes write about. That *fic* exists at all is remarkable, and points to the dramatic increase in approval and knowledge of fandom and fanfiction over the last decade. *Fic* was in part made possible by Lev Grossman's July 2011 article in *Time* magazine, "The Boy Who Lived Forever," which describes fanfiction as an important part of remix culture. However, many popular references to fic aren't so flattering. But even when fanfiction is taken seriously, many popular media and literacy scholars still seem to believe that Jenkins' arguments are sufficient explanation for what fanfiction is and does.[7] Studies of fanfiction have historically suffered from the same accusations Bakhtin says were lobbed at the novel. He says, "There is a highly characteristic and widespread point of view that sees novelistic discourse as an extra-artistic medium, a discourse that is not worked into any special or unique style" (260). That is, like novels were, fanfiction is frequently seen as something trivial and derivative, not useful for much at all.

When the *Huffington Post* asked if the recent Colors of Benetton advertisements showing world leaders kissing was bad fanfiction, they were asking a rhetorical question: in the minds of the general public, fanfiction is always bad (np). It is this perception that

[7] Jenkins work is quite rightly widely cited. See: Kathleen Fitzpatrick 2011, Paul Booth 2010.

allowed Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam to turn their book *A Billion Wicked Thoughts* into an international best-seller. As part of their research, Ogas and Gaddam extensively surveyed fanfiction readers and writers, including minors.[8] They used their study of fanfiction to explain, for example, their theory that too much feminism will destroy the sex life of a heterosexual couple (96).[9] Meanwhile, an opinion piece in *The Guardian* says fanfiction is "the lowest point we've reached in the history of culture-it's crass, sycophantic, celebrity obsessed, naive, badly-written, derivative, consumerist, unoriginal" and will destroy all of western culture's impulse to create anything new (np). It is used frequently to attempt to unsettle celebrities in interviews (see: every question about Larry Stylinson). *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Twilight* fanfiction formerly called "Master of the Universe" that was deliberately written to gain an audience for a novel before it was published for the general public, is an international best-seller and the basis for a film, and despite its more than three years on the *New York Times* bestseller's list, is nevertheless widely considered to be hackish trash. Its enormous popularity has opened ground for many other pull-to-publish novels, and also for widespread mocking of fandom and fanfiction. As one recent article bitterly describes E.L. James' writing in *Fifty Shades of Grey*:

[8] Their behavior in this study was so egregious that Boston University, their degree-granting institution, issued a public statement disclaiming any responsibility for or association with the study. This was necessary, in part, because Ogas and Gaddam claimed they had IRB approval when they didn't, and because they were recording the sexually explicit fantasies of minors.

[9] I wish I was making this up. They also explain that gay men (all of them!) have larger than average penises and- since they never talk about them in this wide-ranging book on sexuality - seem to think that lesbians don't exist.

> Anyone whose trudged through James' prose can attest to the fact that, as a writer, English is clearly her third or fourth language. Her command of corporeal situations is Puritanical at best, and without the sex, the books are like 'American Psycho' without the gore or the '80s music references. (Gibron np.)

Another common response to fanfiction in popular culture is the "think of the children" approach. Author Stephen Downes manages to even be concerned about one of the most publicly acceptable aspects of fanfiction:

> The wordage produced by some young FanFic authors/contributors is staggering. To give you some idea, an average published novel is 95,000 words, a saga novel can be twice or three times that and can represent three years' work for a professional author. It is not uncommon for dedicated FanFic writers to produce 300,000 words of FanFic a *year*. Truly, 300,000 words is a monumental amount of time and effort, and sadly most of it is wasted as the vast majority of FanFic authors will not go on to write in any professional sense.
>
> Additionally, the cost to their private lives, their social development and their social interaction skills outside of internet forums can only be detrimental, not to mention the diversion from study, which could have a huge effect on their college and career prospects. (np)

Even worse, they might begin to ignore proper (commercialized) stories. What will happen to the world "as young readers stop reading, watching and learning from

mainstream mediums and begin to solely enjoy and mimic FanFic" (np). Downes isn't sure, but he doesn't like the idea.

I argue that reading fanfiction texts as texts, rather than as sources of psychoanalytic inquiry gives us a more productive framework for studying this vast field of material. All we have to do is "radically reconsider" our notions of "poetic discourse," work that is already starting to take place (267). Jamison is currently teaching "Fanfiction: Transformative Works from Shakespeare to Sherlock" at Princeton.[10] *The Daily Dot* began running a regular column on fandom and fanfiction in 2012, and *The New Statesman* followed with their own column in 2014. *Slash: Romance Without Boundaries* is a recently introduced card game similar to *Apples to Apples*, but with fic-like prompts. Some public responses to fanfiction are less flattering, but still take fanfiction seriously. Mark Shrayber's 2014 *Jezebel* article "'Knotting' is the Weird Fanfic Sex Trend That Cannot Be Unseen" suggests:

> Of course knotting isn't as visceral in the same way something like extreme pornography may be due to the fact that it's not only fictional but also (technically) impossible. But fiction of this nature is also becoming a mainstream staple of internet culture, which always bears discussion. Today it's a panel at a failed convention; tomorrow it might be the subject of a semester-long university course. (Np)

These mixed sources point to a growing public acceptance of the importance of fandom, and fanfiction particularly, even if it that recognition isn't always positive.

[10] Spring 2015

Given the tremendous popularity of fanfiction, and its role in digital writing practices, it is curious that it hasn't been more widely studied, while other kinds of digital writing like file sharing, coding, placing Amazon.com orders, and even personal digital writing like tweeting, texting, and Facebook posts have. As I said earlier, however, when we think about digital writing, especially in classrooms, the idea of plagiarism becomes increasingly important. Rebecca Moore Howard has written extensively about the anxiety about post-internet plagiarism in both the shaping of rhetoric and composition instruction and popular attitudes towards reading and writing practices. The increased access to texts, she says, has caused an increased anxiety about plagiarism, as if readers and writers would, given broader access, become promiscuous. As she says in 2007:

> The comparison is grounded in a sense of writing as an inherently moral (or potentially immoral) activity and in a concomitant equation of morality and disease. The moral person is a healthy person; the immoral, diseased. With the proliferation of online texts, the cultural imposition of standards succumbs in an orgy of text. (5) R.M. Howard / Computers and Composition 24 (2007) 3–15

Fanfiction's combination of excessive texts, excessive feelings, and textual promiscuity, then, has perhaps created a barrier towards more extensive research in digital writing studies. I want to argue that this exclusion reproduces these ideas of textual promiscuity and contagion. The connection between this idea of plagiarism and attitudes towards fanfiction are almost inextricably linked, and linked also to the idea of the hordes of scribbling women so feared by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Moore neatly summarizes several

decades of debate by saying “It is readers’ access to copious text that makes them believe in writers’ plagiarism. Their fear that an absence of control over access to text means greater abuse of text leads to a sense that something must be done” (7). Confronted by fanfiction, which is (at least perceived to be) excesses of texts written by those same terrifying women, cultural anxiety about socio-economic boundaries becomes readily apparent. By including fanfiction in the classroom, rather than ignoring it, we allow these important ideas surrounding literacy practices to enter our common conversations – not only amongst professional educators but with our students; it allows us another way to draw back the curtain.

Chapter One: Database/Form/Content

"New media does not radically break with the past; rather, it distributes weight differently between the categories that hold culture together, foregrounding what was in the background, and vice versa." – Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, p. 229

1. Introduction

Between 2010-2013 it became common to ask celebrities to read fanfiction, often about themselves or the characters they portrayed in films and television, aloud during interviews. These readings inevitably contain cringing and laughing on the part of the readers and the interviewers. Ellen Degeneres, Gilbert Godfried, Charlize Theron, Kristen Stewart, Chris Hemsworth have all blushingly read *50 Shades of Grey* on video, while Robert Pattinson claims to have read the original fanfiction version, "Master of the Universe." The laughing and embarrassment occurs for obvious reasons: the people in question are often embarrassed to be reading erotica about themselves, and even more embarrassed to be consuming and performing pornography in public (the interviewers nearly always choose the most pornographic scenes they can find). These interviews, however, usually also contain explicit mocking of the genre itself. "Why would anyone write this? I can't read this," says Ellen (np).

When I first began thinking about this project in 2007, fanfiction was a relatively unknown genre outside of its own communities. Because of its salacious reputation, most fanfiction creators and readers wouldn't talk about their fannish lives or creations with people outside of their direct (and presumably safe) fan communities. That year I started asking nearly everyone I met if they knew what fanfiction was, if they read it or wrote it

or knew anyone who did. The answer - almost inevitably - was no. But more and more often, some of those same people would come to me privately and confess that they did, but that they didn't want anyone else to know.

Between then and now fanfiction has become a big business, and yet for many reasons fanfiction's reputation is hardly improved. People who confess to reading fanfiction or *50 Shades* are confessing to reading "mommy porn." The wide-spread use of this description was perhaps prompted by the *New York Times Review* which appeared March 10, 2012, where Julie Bosman described the book as "Fifty Shades of Grey," an erotic novel by an obscure author that has been described as "Mommy porn" and "Twilight" for grown-ups, has electrified women across the country, who have spread the word like gospel on Facebook pages, at school functions and in spin classes" (np). When I did a search for "50 Shades of Gray mommy porn" Google has just offered me 387,000 results. What is interesting is that the review of the book appeared in the Business Section of the *Times*, despite it having already sold nearly one million copies in the United States at the time. The article sidesteps the copyright issues surrounding the novel, but is clear about it being fanfiction, and makes extensive and tittering comments on the quality of the writing and the "purple prose" of the text.

> Online reviewers have criticized the author for her plodding prose and habit of printing lengthy contracts and e-mail exchanges between characters in the text.
>
> "The books are just so long," said Sarah Wendell, a blogger and the co-author of "Beyond Heaving Bosoms." "They suffer from the same lack of content and pacing. They're very dense, with a lot of detail. They just don't go anywhere." (np)

The article says that despite –or *because of*- these poor qualities, women, and in particular middle-aged women, are buying enormous numbers of this embarrassingly bad book of pornography.

> "What I found fascinating is that there are all these supermotivated, smart, educated women saying this was like the greatest thing they've ever read," said Meg Lazarus, a 38-year-old former lawyer in Scarsdale, whose friends and acquaintances have been buzzing about the book. "I don't get it. There's a lot of violence, and this guy is abhorrent sometimes." (np)

The readers are depicted as having no taste in literature, because they're buying so many copies of the novel, and simultaneously as being ashamed of what they're reading. "Women like digital versions," the article continues, "because in the 21st century, women have the ability to read this kind of material without anybody knowing what they're reading, because they can read them on their iPads and Kindles" (np). Essentially, the readers are ashamed, and if they're not, they should be. As a very public representation of the criticisms people use for fanfiction, the ongoing criticism of *Fifty Shades of Grey* illuminates some of the cultural ramifications of fanfiction. Similarly hackish genre fiction like Tom Clancy or Len Deighton is widely accepted as a common part of the book universe. There's something about *Fifty Shades*, and other fanfiction works, that is threatening enough to disturb everyone from *The New York Times* to *The Atlantic Monthly* to your neighbor next door.

These threats can be generally summarized as: a cultural fear of amateur production/gatekeeping of extent power structures, the ongoing dismissiveness toward the ideas, desires and work of women, the admittedly waning emphasis on originality in "art," and the old Enlightenment idea that one must be objective to be reasonable. Fans, by definition, are not objective about their work, and therefore even "aca-fans" and their work are still viewed with suspicion. For example, well-known game scholar Ian Bogost said in a blog post that "Embracing aca-fandom is a bad idea. Not because it's immoral or crude, but because it's too great a temptation. Those of us who make an enviable living being champions of media, particularly popular media, must also remain dissatisfied with them" (np), and recently tweeted that "TV critics are too blinded by affection to do the required analysis (my ongoing suspicion of aca-fandom)." While Bogost's statement was part of a larger conversation, it speaks to a feeling even in the humanities of the need for some kind of objectivity in research. This objectivity is perhaps possible for video games, but not for fanfiction.

The result of these attitudes for digital humanities work is that even when academics take fanfiction and fandom seriously, it can still be implied that fanfiction is a lesser or easier form of reading and writing than original or traditional fiction, one that can train writers through imitation of more popular and acceptable texts - texts that have already passed the gatekeepers of publishing houses and editors. For example, in Rebecca Black's excellent *Adolescents and online fanfiction* (2006), she focuses on "many of the literacy and social practices taking place in one of the largest online fanfiction archives, Fanfiction.net," illustrating how through composing texts, creating fan sites, and interacting on the site itself many English Language Learners are able to develop social

and intellectual cachet as successful writers and users of English (Black 2005, 2006), and develop skills that are promoted through popular writing pedagogy (*A New Literacies Sampler* 126).[11] The unfortunate implication of focusing on fanfiction as a space for inexperienced English-language writers is that more developed readers and writers don't or shouldn't occupy these literacy spaces.

Finally, fanfiction is frequently seen as a very different sort of work than other kinds of remix culture such as music and the plastic arts, where remixes are widely accepted. Famous fantasy author Ursula LeGuin summarizes the matter neatly:

> As for anybody publishing any story "derived from" my stuff, I am absolutely opposed to it & have never given anyone permission to do so. It is lovely to "share worlds" if your imagination works that way, but mine doesn't; to me, it's not sharing but an invasion, literally — strangers coming in and taking over the country I live in, my heartland.
> This applies, of course, to fiction only. I have given permission to all sorts of script writers, playwrights, musicians, dancers, etc. to use my stuff for performance pieces, and collaborated happily with many of them. That's different. That's a gas! Collaboration is one thing, co-optation is another.
> (np)

As LeGuin points out, many of the claims about fanfiction emerge from the belief that fanfiction is derivative, rather than creative; alphabetic-based texts can, she says, be

[11] See also Soomin Jwa (2012).

transformed into anything but other alphabetic-based texts, at which point they become derivative. The reason its adult readers and writers are rarely mentioned, or that when they are it is in the disparaging tones that surround *50 Shades of Grey*, is largely due to the assumption that fanfiction is immature writing - at best, a sort of training wheel mechanism that might train readers and writers to appreciate better writing later. The converse claim is that, having teethed on fanfiction, its consumers might never recover from exposure to such poorly written work and continue to read and write at this level for the rest of their lives.

I argue, though, that these claims of quality are made because reading fanfiction requires a fairly complicated kind of literacy. That is, a lot of people who aren't fans are reading fanfiction (if you'll forgive the term) wrong. My theory is that this is because fanfiction *looks* a lot like traditional storytelling. It usually is plain text on a plain screen, it typically follows a linear narrative structure, and it is often a romantic storyline, which places it at some disadvantage for serious consideration. These features seem to preclude fanfiction from being considered as a kind of digital narrative. As Astrid Ensslin says in their examination of what determines "literariness" in digital spaces, "digital literature excludes at least two mainstream forms of digital media that we might otherwise associate with the term: e-books or any other paper-under-glass forms of digital writing that can be printed without losing their specific aesthetic appeal and distinctive interactive qualities" (3). Despite these attributes, fanfiction is not a traditional narrative form, but instead is a kind of new media object; it has to be read against a different set of standards than traditional fiction. Reading fanfiction as a kind of new media object rather than judging it by the standards of traditional narratives reveals a complexity of meaning

and a depth of reading and writing skills that have been frequently overlooked. In this chapter, I will begin to explain how reading fanfiction requires strong digital literacy, and why this is important for digital rhetoric and composition scholars.

2. Database/Form/Content

In 2001's *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich describes the database as the dominant form of the computer age; storage is the means to success. The repetitive impulses of websites - the degree to which images and forms are reposted- means, he says, that "the same data would give rise to more indexes than the number of data elements themselves" (225). Re-tweeting is one example of this idea in action: the same data of the tweet is indexed however many times it is retweeted. Retweeting seems intuitive, a logical way of sharing information and extending conversations, because at its heart the internet itself is made up of composite bits of information that get copied and sent around from place to place. We're all familiar with the idea of the binary system, that what we do on computers is controlled by a series of 1s and 0s. We know that images are made up of pixels, and that when we save a file, our computer often puts lots of little bits of the file in different places on our hard drives, only showing us the composite file when we ask to see it again on our screens. The underlying premise of web negotiation is that there are large databases of information, and a large variety of interfaces that let us access that information. Anyone who has made a webpage knows that how we access that information is just as if not more important than the information that website contains.

But what this database/interface relationship means is that in typical internet use there tends to be far more data indexes than there are data[12]. Tumblr[13] with its endless reblogging is perhaps the most current example of the combination of the repetitive impulse inherent in the internet and the way interfaces create access to data.

Figure 1: a screen grab from Tumblr showing two chicken nuggets fried together with the caption "The chicken nugger is now undergoing it's final phase of mitosis."

As you can see in Figure 1, this picture of a chicken nugget had been reblogged on Tumblr over 42,000 times as of June 2013.[14] Essentially, fanfiction operates on this

[12] The reverse of this is true in large-scale computing storage. For example, the Library of Congress's ongoing efforts to handle their archive of tweets. The creation of a proper interface has not yet been developed, and so this data is impossible for an average internet user to access.

[13] Tumblr is a website on which users can share images and blocks of text. These posts are then made "rebloggable" - that is, other users may repost the images on their own accounts on the website so that their viewers and followers can see and reblog them. You may add your own commentary to a post if you re-blog it. Tumblr is notable for its user base, which is heavily skewed toward teenagers and that its unique software makes searching almost impossible unless you know the exact tags a user puts on their posts. It is much like MySpace in many aspects.

[14] This is a reference to the popular "Chicken Nugger" story, which emerged from an unfortunate misspelling on a menu. (This appears to be the original post: http://time-

same database/interface structure. For example, below is an excerpt from "Harry Potter and the Eagle of Truthiness," a parody. Because parodies exaggerate key aspects of the texts they are mocking, they are good examples; in general fanfiction is a more subtle in its writing. This is the one where Stephen Colbert becomes the new Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts. The bolded sections are based on the *Harry Potter* canon, & the italic sections are based on popular imagery from Stephen Colbert's show.

"Bloody Hell," Ron said, thunderstruck.

The students who had been raised in Muggle households, like Harry, were not quite as shocked as those who'd grown up with all-wizard families, but Ron's outburst seemed to speak for them all as they filed in. **The dank stone walls** were l*ost in shadow and highlighted by dramatic ruby-red and sapphire-blue glows. Banners, flags, and emblems billowed, waved, and flowed through the darkness.*

Their usual rows of desks and chairs *had been replaced with a semicircle of rising tiers of seats facing a rounded dais, where magically illuminated letters scrolled "Professor Colbert" across the bottom. The teacher's desk stood upon the dais, glossy and modern.* Tucked away behind it was a large nest, suitable for the high rocky aerie of an eagle.

Harry took a seat and continued looking around. **He had gotten so used to Hogwarts over the years that he now felt as unsure as he had the first time Hagrid had led him into Diagon Alley, with its fantastic array of shops.**

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sponges.tumblr.com/post/49136166757/you-sit-at-the-restaurant-with-your-young-son-he)

To one side of the dais and desk was a large table, upon **which rested an item he recognized as a Pensieve, like the one Dumbledore kept in his office**. *To the other was a section of wall featuring a blazing fireplace and sets of bookshelves holding a fascinating array of items, including several trophies and a scattering of little oddly-shaped dice. There was a portrait of Colbert over the mantle*, showing him impeccably clad in a suit better than any that even **the Minister of Magic owned, but unlike the ones Gilderoy Lockhart had displayed, this portrait did not preen with desperate narcissism.** (Np)

Like all parodies, the story is funny because we're familiar with the material being (lovingly) mocked. The "word of the day" skit was a standard piece on *The Stephen Colbert Show* for years, and it is difficult not to be at least vaguely familiar with the *Harry Potter* franchise. As we can see in the story above, fic follows the same sort of database structure that Tumblr does. In following similar narrative arcs and repurposing characters over and over again, fanfiction incorporates the repetitive impulse Manovich describes.

Manovich goes on to argue that a distinguishing feature of new media objects is that "the content of the work and the interface are separated," an **idea N. Katherine Hayles** draw upon later, allowing artists to create multiple interfaces to that content (227). The results of these new interfaces may be completely different works, or they may be minor variations on the same work.

The relationship between form and content has of course been widely theorized in both English and Digital Media Studies, with **Marshall McLuhan's** "The Medium is the

Message," perhaps being the most cited work for the latter group, but digital rhetoric and digital humanities work offer us another perspective. **Alan Liu** describes the database/interface relationship of web texts as relying on "data pours," arguing that first generation websites had a tight relationship between form and content, where the "most substantive content was there on the page together with formatting code and other elements under the direct, often idiosyncratic control of the author" (np). In the then-contemporary websites, in contrast, " [r]ecords are poured automatically from the database onto the web page one at a time, but because the data pour is nested within a repeat statement ….the author may not know what is in the database or may have ceded control of the database to someone else" (np). As readers, this kind of function indeed defines more and more of our web experiences, as we follow and friend people and corporations on Facebook, Twitter, and the like, and the interfaces adjust according to algorithms we don't see. Liu says this kind of writing limits the power of both authors and readers in ways that reflect the frustrations of hypertext, that the databases have created a huge "blind spot on the page that authors, artists, and designers of the interface no longer directly control but can only parameterize" (np), that we have ceded control of our interfaces to the point that we have lost control of our messages.

I argue, though, that when we apply these concepts to fanfiction, they reveal the strength of the medium rather than its weakness, and it is what makes it interesting and useful for rhetoric scholars. Fanfiction's founding databases are the canons of the source texts; fanfiction is the interface that allows us to access those databases in millions of

different ways. And so fanfiction's multiple iterations of characters and stories replicates the basic structures of how we use the internet. Through fanfiction the database is what is being repeated, while the interface changes each time. Harry Potter - the part of the database being accessed- is himself in a story with minor variations on the structure of Hogwarts, herself when he is a she, himself when he is friends instead of enemies with Dudley, himself when he is forty years older than depicted in the canon. If we read fanfiction as a new media object, the stories become interfaces into the shared databases of canon knowledge. The database/interface connection in fanfiction means that each story gives a different perspective on that material; it is an inherently rhetorical genre.

3. The history of hypertext: early digital narrative studies

The relationship between the database and the interface is one of the key differences between fanfiction and what many of us may recall when we think of digital narratives. Early scholarship on new media narratives often focused on hypertext fiction, a kind of narrative that had a brief period of popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the most popular of these texts is unarguably Michael Joyce's 1987 text *Afternoon*, a story about a man who witnesses a car crash that may or may not involve his family. In hypertext fiction, the reader is typically presented with a series of links or images; you negotiate the text by clicking on the links. In *Afternoon*, clicking on words within the text takes you to another set of the man's thoughts about his family and the events that happened. There is no set order, and the only ending occurs when you have exhausted all possible links - which is very difficult to do. *Afternoon* was written in Storyspace, software designed by Michael Joyce and Jay David Bolter that mimicked internet hyperlinking capabilities, and so was able to be distributed widely in a time when network access was rare. Bolter says "*Afternoon* is about the problem of its own reading"

(*Writing Space*, 127), a statement that will resonate with readers of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who conceptualized thought as rhizomatic rather than as hierarchical. At the time, these texts generated a resurgence of interest in poststructuralism, which had begun to be overshadowed by New Criticism and cultural studies,[15] especially in the growing field of new media studies (at the time more frequently called hypertext studies). Hypertext studies were particularly focused on the opportunities digital environments gave to readers to control their reading experiences. The democratization of the reading/writing space, and of the classroom, was a key factor in this area of hypertext theory.[16]

Much was made of the role of the reader – frequently coined as the "wreader" – in these kinds of works, as scholars asserted the reader, by choosing which link to click next, became the writer/author of their own text.[17] As media theorist George Landow put it, in hypertext educators could find a "fundamental reconfiguration of authorship, including ideas of authorial property, and of status relations in the text" (36). Greg Ulmer developed his Mystory projects with this same kind of random linking in mind. Mystories are "a collection or set of elements gathered together temporarily in order to represent my comprehension of the scene of academic discourse" (*Teletheory* 106). Still popular in certain kinds of composition courses, they use multiple kinds of texts (video,

[15] The context of *Afternoon* was and is rather contested. Espen Aarseth says in *Cybertext* that *Afternoon* is an example of modernist fiction. At the same time, it's connection to postmodernism and poststructuralism cannot be denied.

[16] See *The Theory and Criticism of Virtual Texts: An Annotated Bibliography, 1988-1999*, by Lory Hawkes, Christina Murphy, and Joe Law (2001) for a fascinating overview of early digital theory.

[17] "Wreader" or sometimes "w/reader" was ubiquitous in hypertext scholarship for a time, used by Patricia Gilbert, Anja Rau, George Landow, Richard Lanham and so on, and is still occasionally used today.

sound, flat text) to tell a story of the writer's life.[18] The language Ulmer uses to describe Mystories reflects the hypertext linking sensibility - in a mystory a set of objects are placed near each other (usually but not always in a digital space), but are not explicitly connected, following Landow's idea that "in hypertext, centrality resides in the mind of the beholder" (105). The drive here is toward invention in both the reader and the creator of the work, that the links creators and readers followed would inspire further connections in their own minds. As Ulmer goes on to say, for example, "to write a mystory about the future of theory is not to create an expectation of a resolution, the illusion of an explanation; not to predict, assert, or attack…" (Teletheory 109); the process of moving through the texts is more important than the final product[19].

The impact of this kind of work on composition and literacy pedagogy can be seen in works like Doug Eyman's 1996 article "Hypertext in the Computer-Facilitated Writing Class," which appears in one of the earliest issues of *Kairos*, where he argues for the benefits of hypertext as an inherently collaborative medium.

This idea is readily evident in the lexia for his article, pictured below:

[18] Ulmer's theories emerged from the collective early digital theories at Florida State that privilege invention over polished final products. As the role of databases has expanded, so has the use of MyStories; there are now many commercial versions of software enabling their creation. Closer to home, MyStories have been used at least four times in the last four years in DWRL classrooms.

[19] Ulmer begins this work in *Teletheory* and develops it more concretely for composition classrooms in his later book *Heuretics,* but his use of Derrida's middle voice in *Teletheory* is to my mind one of the most useful aspects of his work.

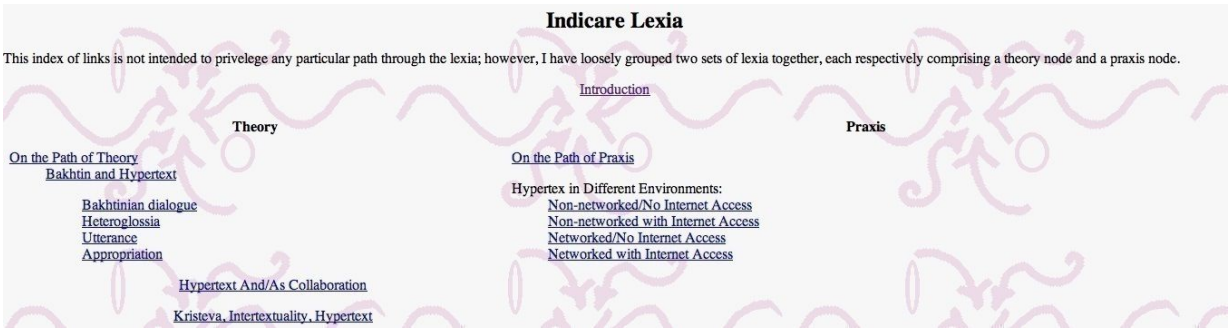

Figure 2: a screen grab from *Kairos* 1.2 (1996), titled "Indicare Lexia."

Despite the orderly rows, the goal of the unnumbered links, so unlike a traditional table of contents or the numbered sections of print text articles, is to decenter the text and therefore reduce the authority of the creator. These works were groundbreaking at the time, and provided a foundation for digital scholarship in English. It was out of these kinds of texts and scholarship that new media literacy and rhetoric studies emerged.

However, despite the strong scholarly interest, *Afternoon, Patchwork Girl*, *Victory Garden* and other hypertext fictions didn't receive more than nominal attention outside the academy. Over time, it became clear that the kinds of writing and reading occurring in hypertext fiction never quite turned into "The interactive reader of the electronic word incarnates the responsive reader of whom we make so much….[who] can genuflect before the text or spit on its altar, add to a text or subtract from it, rearrange it, revise it, suffuse it with commentary" digital scholars like Richard Lanham hoped would emerge (6) from these environments. There are multiple reasons for this: beyond the entry barrier of needing to buy the software to read the stories, many readers didn't perceive them as "real" stories at all. Rather than being active, readers felt trapped and even more at the creator's mercy. As Bolter notes in his keynote address at the 1992

Computers and Writing conference, readers had been trained to desire closure in their texts, and could be frustrated by the never-endingness of hypertexts.

Another reason for hypertext fiction's lack of popularity is the medium that the texts used; this is a primary difference between hypertext fiction and fanfiction, and one of the reasons that fanfiction isn't widely studied or incorporated into academic work. While one of the goals of hypertext fictions was to make texts transparent, to forefront their digital genre in the way that modernist and postmodernists text do, they were ultimately not entirely successful in this. As I described above, the interfaces of hypertext fiction tend to follow a very standard pattern:

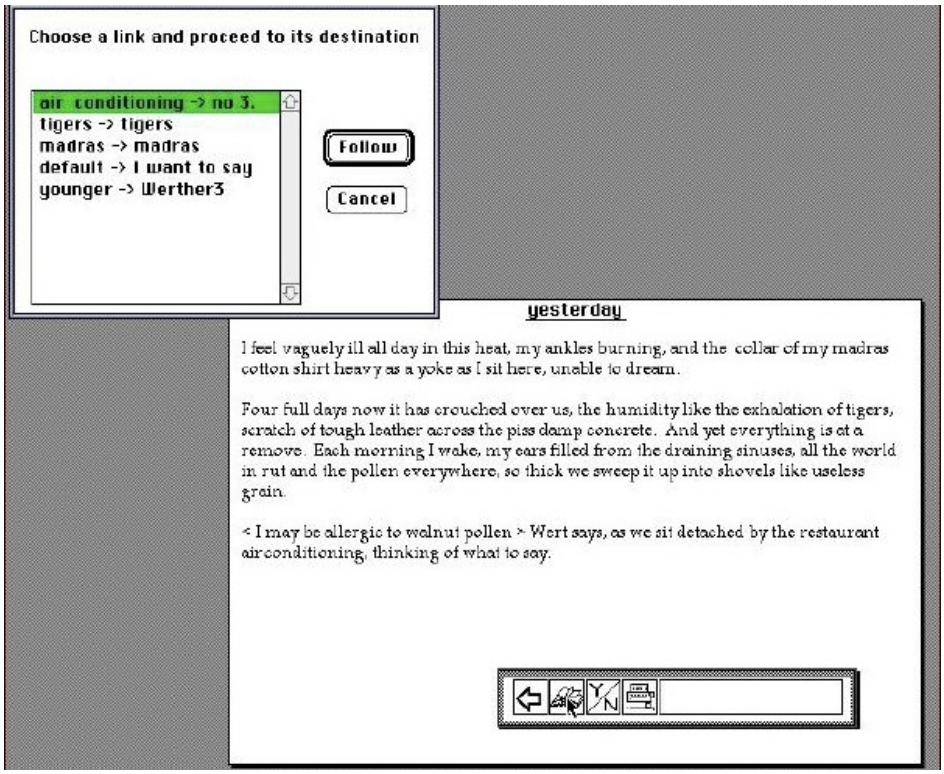

Figure 3: screen grab from *Afternoon*, by Michael Joyce, showing the "yesterday" card and its outgoing links box. The top link, "air conditioning → no. 3." is highlighted.

As we see here and in Eyman's article above, to read a hypertext fiction, you click a link or image which takes you to another screen that looks almost identical to the first, though it might have perhaps a video or an audio file. In using this kind of structure, these texts privilege the database- an un-ordered list of items- over the interface, to use Manovich's terms (226). They force the reader to create their own lexicon each time they read. What this means is that these kinds of texts quite intentionally do not have patterns; unless the reader writes their own code into the work[20] or note their path on another text that they can refer to the next time they want to re-read the text, there is no pattern they can rely on, and re-reading the text in the same pattern is nearly impossible. Disorientation is a key aspect of these kinds of texts; they overtly try to mimic the feeling of wandering through a database, but the paths you can take are of course determined by the creator. The lexicon to the text hasn't vanished, it is just invisible to the reader. The interface is deliberately difficult, simultaneously forcing the reader to act as a writer and coder of the script while ensuring that they will fail.

The author's control over the reader's experience in hypertext fiction was reiterated when Michael Joyce said in an interview with Matthew Kirschenbaum nearly thirty years after *Afternoon*'s first release that he and Bolter were always convinced that any digital work was equally informed by hierarchical and networked structures, pushing against the large body of scholarship that had built up around these kinds of texts. As Kirschenbaum says, "The point, then, is that Storyspace has significant grounding in a hierarchical data model that is absent from, or at times…presented as overtly antithetical to, the rhizomatic networks of postmodern hypertext theory" (173). And so readers of

[20] As was famously done on the "Jane Douglas" node of *Afternoon*.

hypertext fiction found that the authority seemed to rest ultimately in the author and - just like flat print texts - in the medium in which the texts were written.[21]

4. Fanfiction structure

Imagine
being
Able to
transform
your images
in any way
you can
Imagine
being
able to

- Michael Joyce, personal notebook held in the Harry Ransom Center collection (original spacing and capitalization).

As we read a book, or even a magazine article, we wait for the events to unfold across the pages; this is narrative.[22] Fanfiction, with its relatively linear narrative structures and

[21] See: Gardner 2003, Page and Thomas 2005.

print-based aesthetics, would at first seem to be the same. Read as a *new media object*, though, one that follows a database logic in its internal structures, it is something very different. Fanfiction isn't the same as hypertext fiction because it presents databases of knowledge and linking in a more approachable form. In *The Language of New Media*, Manovich famously construes narratives and databases as "natural enemies," saying that databases are unordered, and narratives rely on cause and effect (225).

In fanfiction, "context" and "interface" are separated, the context for the fic lies in the canon material, far outside the immediate platform of the story. Again, the canon works as a database, while creators of fic select particular aspects of the canon to focus on.

The separation of content and interface in fanfiction leads to an almost overwhelming number of layered references in each text. In practice, these referents- just as they do in more traditional fiction - can sometimes make a story unreadable or much less enjoyable if you do not understand them (*Ulysses* might be a familiar example). As we saw in "The Eagle of Truthiness," above, if you are to enjoy a story outside your own fandom the characterization and world-building of the narrative must be much more thorough.

In the example below, we will see that the author has included several referents to multiple objects or items only known to fans of the media - those that have access to their community's shared database of knowledge (otherwise known as the canon).

This is an excerpt from "you are a paradigm," a Sherlock fic by 1electricpirate, which I've chosen at random from the *Sherlock Holmes* tag in *The Archive of Our Own*:

---

[22] It has been a long time since I've heard people talk about syuzhet and fabula.

> "You went to boarding school in Scotland," Sherlock says, quickly, his eyes coursing across Prewett at speeds he usually saves for cadavers. "Eleven until eighteen. Specialised school." He frowns. "You can't have gone to school with John, he went ..." Sherlock stops, mid-sentence, drawing a sudden blank. (Part of John, the part that isn't cowering in secret terror, crows out proudly at once more stumping Sherlock Holmes.) "John. Where did you go to school? Your father couldn't possibly afford boarding school."
>
> "Scholarship," John improvises. "I went to Prewett's school on scholarship for my last two years."
>
> Pale, sharp eyes narrow at him, but Sherlock nods, jerkily, accepting it even though he doesn't like it. (Again, a small part of John squawks in triumph.) (np)

To understand why Sherlock is speaking in rapid-fire, very short sentences, why he normally looks over cadavers, and why it is important for the narrative that he doesn't know where John (Watson) went to school, you need to be familiar with the 2010-2013 BBC television adaptation of the famous Sherlock Holmes character. The pale, sharp eyes are those of Benedict Cumberbatch, widely beloved by internet fandoms, who plays Sherlock Holmes in the series. Prewett, who appears only in this brief scene of the story, is Fabian Prewett, brother of Molly Weasley, who is Ron Weasley's mother and a caretaker of Harry Potter in the very popular transmedia series of the same name. Prewett's appearance here helps cement this narrative in its crossover world of Harry Potter/Sherlock, and establishes the author as adept in both worlds (as Prewett is precisely the same age as John Watson), garnering the author more of the reader's trust.

This passage requires considerable genre and content knowledge, or what we might call memory work, on the part of the reader. In addition to establishing the story more firmly as a magical crossover, the reference to Prewett allows the author to add an entirely new layer of information about John Watson in a very short amount of space. Instead of having to develop the entire *Harry Potter* world, or at least describe Hogwarts, the famous magical school, the readers can fill in the entire system of coursework, the competition between the school Houses, the social rankings of the cliques within the school, the doubled history of the UK that anyone going to that school would acquire (magical and non-magical, and an entirely new set of enemies) and so on.[23] A significant amount of the content of the story, then, lies well outside the interface through which the story is developed and presented - the plain text on the screen. The difference between this interface and the one used by hypertext fiction is that the pathway or lexicon to the text has been made clear to the reader, and especially clear to fans of the canons involved. Like *Ulysses*, it is readable whether you have extensive canon knowledge or not, but instead of reaching for Gifford's annotations, which is available to a rather limited audience, we can watch the entire BBC Sherlock series in a weekend. Reading and writing fanfiction then is not quite reading what we think of as a traditional (original) narrative nor reading hypertext. This kind of writing and reading relies upon associational thinking; the kind of mental work required to draw connections between a variety of ideas to form a new image or theory.

Associational thinking drives digital spaces and especially the internet. In describing his idea of a "memex machine," what we can imagine as a precursor to

[23] As, indeed, I have just expected of my own readers.

hypertext theory, Vannemar Bush grounds his machine in just this kind of thought in his famous 1945 article "As We May Think":

> It affords an immediate step, however, to associative indexing, the basic idea of which is a provision whereby any item may be caused at will to select immediately and automatically another. This is the essential feature of the memex. *The process of tying two items together is the important thing*. (7, my emphasis)

The influence of Bush's thought is hard to overstate. He was an important figure for people such as Tim Berners-Lee, Alan Kay, and Douglas Englebert (creators of the world wide web, the laptop, and the mouse, respectively).[24] Everything about the internet relies on linking pieces of information and thought together. Daily use of the internet has made this process a key feature of many people's thinking processes, and rendered it nearly invisible except in certain circumstances - most notably when we encounter someone who isn't doing it. However, associational thinking is readily visible in fanfiction, where community knowledge of the canon means they don't have to provide hyperlinks to the information that is referenced in the story. Instead the basic mechanism of associational thinking and hyperlinking is still present, reflected in the works themselves. Through these conceptual virtual or implied hyperlinks the reference to Prewett stands in for all of the *Harry Potter* universe.

[24] An excellent (if now dated) brief summary of Bush's influence is the short paper describing "50 Years After 'As We May Think'" symposium held at Brown University in 1995.

Fanfiction is about this association. Fic looks quite like something it isn't; it comes from a different place than paper-based fiction. Fanfiction as we know it now is a replication of the structure it is built upon. Anne Wysocki has suggested that we call new media texts "those that have been made by consumers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality: such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text - like its composers and readers - doesn't function independently of how it is made and in what contexts" (15). The kind of linking apparent in fanfiction always forefronts the materiality and medium of the fic itself, as well as the materiality and contexts of the outside material. Understanding fic's use of databases is crucial to understanding the medium.

5. Databases: a brief history, and why it matters

Databases are so widely used and so much a part of our daily (computerized) lives that a lot of people rarely think about how they work. Most computer databases are relational - they work by associating things together by doing some elaborate math, and are the reason you can search for "mom" in your email search box and have it find mom's emails even though she has four different addresses. These kinds of databases are possible because of the SQL programming language; they were developed in 1970 by E.F. Codd at IBM. Alan Liu summarizes this development quite neatly in his 2009 book *Local Transcendence*:

> Before Codd, we know, databases in the 1960s and 1970s followed the so-called hierarchical model or network paradigms, according to which information was

> logically organized in single-root or multiroot tree structures such that finding anything required transversing a so-called pointer (like running one's index finger down a branching diagram) to the appropriate logical location. The disadvantage, of course, was that changing the structure at a later date…scrambled up all the pointers. (250)

Essentially, this means that before Codd, computer databases worked a lot like an old library card catalog- the kind with hundreds of tiny drawers full of cards. If we wanted to read a book by Madeline L'Engle, for example, we could look for it by author, title, subject, and so on. For one Madeline L'Engle book, then, there were many cards or objects. In contrast, relational tagging (looking for mom) means that instead of multiple objects for one item, we have multiple items in one category. That is, the hierarchical model relies upon redundancies of database organization, in quite a material way. Relational databases, on the other hand, rely upon having redundancies of data, not redundancies of the organization of the data; they give you multiple copies of the Madeline L'Engle book. This underpinning is part of what makes the internet go. (Liu has a great and more detailed description, complete with pictures, but for now we'll carry on.)

This sort of foundational shift in organizing information is one of the things that got early digital scholars like George Landow so excited about the possibilities of the internet and hypertext - in these networks of associational links they saw the physical representation of the theories of post-structural scholars like Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari. Unfortunately for Landow and company, it took a long time for the networks to

become widely available on a personal level, and the organizations (and therefore the largest groups of people) that had access to them, namely corporations like IBM and the military industrial complex, were themselves fairly committed to hierarchical structures in their thought. Reminding ourselves of the materiality of databases and linking is important because it indicates one of the ways that fanfiction is continually concerned with its own materialities and genres, and the way those concerns are represented in textual form.

6. Reading for patterns: a different kind of close reading

One result of relational databases is the impulse toward patterns in digital environments. One basic way we can see this is through the ready transference of memes. But reading for patterns rather than detail, especially in fictional narratives, can sometimes be a controversial topic. On the one hand, reading for patterns can result in the dreaded "looking for a symbol" method of reading we sometimes see in college freshman. And genre fiction and fairytales, which follow strong, easily recognizable external patterns with archetypal characters, are often relegated to the backwoods of college instruction. On the other hand, texts that demonstrate strong and complex *internal* patterning are widely considered to be important texts.[25] Books like *Ulysses*, *Albert Angelo*, and most of Italo Calvino's texts, for example, fall into this second group. One of the key difference between these two groups is that the authors of the second group create texts that are intensely bookish - they forefront the materiality of their texts in a way that

[25] Despite, or perhaps because of, their distinct lack of readership.

the former group doesn't. Genre fiction and fairy tales can be read aloud just as easily as they can be read silently; this is not the case for the second group.[26]

This kind of pattern reading of course existed before the internet. In addition to the examples above, we only need to think of the scene of criminal investigators pinning string to various bits of evidence on a board. However, computers speed this system up quite a lot (we might think of the twitter visualization of the Arab Spring, which shows the connections made by the hashtag #jan25) and make it common.

Collin Brooke argues that rhetoric's classical idea of arrangement is more productively viewed in new media as pattern. Brooke develops the idea that associational linking (like that used by Amazon to suggest books to us based on previous purchasing history) is in fact a pattern; pushing against the random/linear dichotomy of new media/old media that appears in early hypertext theory (101-3). As part of that system, consistent associative linking leads to the creation of even more databases. Pattern, then, is the visible representation that emerges when we read and use databases. This is important because patterns create *generative* spaces, as I'll discuss more later. Fanfiction offers a productive middle ground between these two approaches to examining patterns in digital texts; its genre conventions mean is frequently already divided and sorted via tagging, which makes it easy to see the larger patterns within a group of texts, as Moretti and Jockers recommend, and reveals the details of the patterns and an ongoing creation of

[26] Fan fiction is remarkable, then, because even when it is read aloud (this is called podficcing, a neologism of podcasting and fic writing) it retains the markers of its origins. The reason it can do this is because it is pattern-based writing that forefronts its own medium, demonstrating what N. Katherine Hayles calls "distinctly postmodern textuality" (45).

even more databases via the kind of word-clouds that Brooke examines. Moreover, the texts themselves are built upon repetitive and ever-expanding patterns.

7. Tropes as inventive mediums

These patterns appear clearly in the extensive use of tropes and their related tags in fanfiction. In rhetoric, of course, Kenneth Burke's four primary tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony are the most familiar to us. In fanfiction, "trope" is used differently; they indicate a particular set of textual characteristics that are widely acknowledged and followed by the storytellers and their audiences.[27] Tags, which emerge from tropes, are used in fanfiction in the same way they are used throughout the internet; keywords attached to a text that allow for easy sorting and finding. In this section I'll first describe tropes, and then move on to tags.

Fanfiction's heavy reliance on tropes is one of the reasons it is widely derided; but if we put them into a new media context, they become representations of fanfiction's digital medium. In original fiction,[28] trope-driven fiction is usually genre fiction, such as detective or romance novels. While there has been some recent interest in genre fiction, especially science fiction, it isn't widely considered "good" writing by many standards. Readers of these kinds of stories will sometimes describe them as guilty pleasures, and we are all familiar with the "beach read" lists that herald the sluggish minds of summer

[27] We might think usefully about the ways in which fandom's use of tropes to determine a set of behaviors and practices within critical narratives. Burke himself followed Vico, thinking of tropes as a dialectic method.

[28] "Original fiction," might be though of as a redundant term, but it is important to note, given fanfiction's status as a transformative work.

each year. However, it is impossible to overstate the importance of tropes for fanfiction readers and writers; in fanfiction, tropes are generative, rather than restrictive.

Let's look at another title to investigate this a little bit more. Here is the header for "According to Plans," by eldee, which I chose at random from the Archive of Our Own.[29]

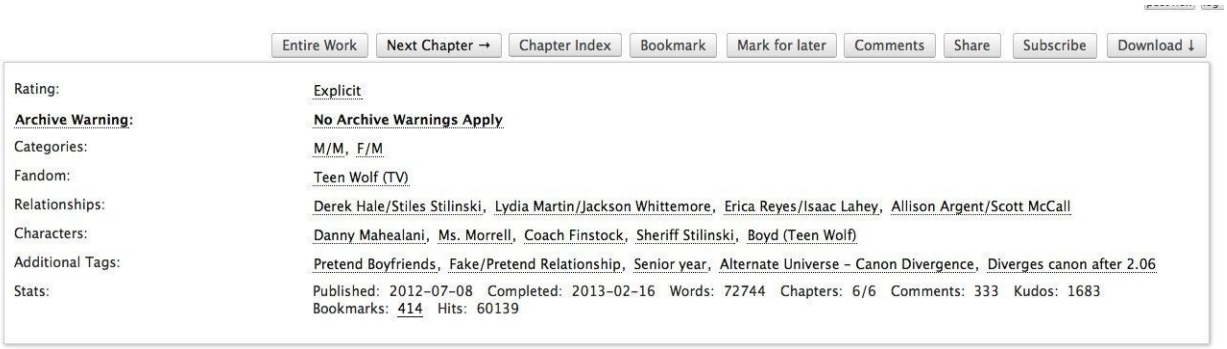

Figure 4: Screengrab from *The Archive of Our Own* showing titles for a *Teen Wolf* fic.

There are several categories of tags on this fic, as there are on most, but the "Additional Tags" section indicate the tropes that are used for this title. This story makes use of the popular trope "Fake/Pretend Relationship," in which (as it says) the main romantic pairing will pretend to be in a relationship as a primary plot device. "Alternate Universe-Canon Divergence" means that the fic will follow most of the characterizations and background plot for the characters up to a certain point in the canon, and then veer off sharply into new plots. This would be a very different fic if it took place in space, rather than in the world created by *Teen Wolf* producer/writer/showrunner Jeff Davis, which is a medium-sized town in northern California that happens to have werewolves as residents.

[29] I'm using *The Archive of Our Own* frequently throughout this dissertation due to the ease of searching it and because of the way it reflects the traditions of the Usenet —> Fanfiction.net / Livejournal communities that gave rise to the widespread popularity of fanfiction over the last 15 years. Beyond that, I volunteer for their parent organization, The Organization for Transformative Works, which hosts a variety of important fandom projects.

The space story would have the tag "Alternate Universe- Space," and the plot would be whatever the author created instead of following the series timeline. The "Senior Year" tag alerts the readers to the timeline of the story, which pushes the characters a couple of years past their canon sophomore year of high school. (Also worth noting, perhaps, is that this novella length story has been accessed nearly 60,000 times in the eight months it had been available when I accessed it.)

The importance of tropes to fandom communities might be best described through the very popular bingo games. Fanfiction Bingo cards look like this:

de-aged	holiday	cross-dressing	au: steampunk	slavefic
day at the beach	in vino veritas / drunkfic	au: neighbors	huddle for warmth	au: college / highschool
secret relationship	curtainfic	FREE ★ SPACE	truth or dare	celebratory kiss
au: historical	food porn	secret twin / doppelganger	fusion	kiss to save the day
fake relationship	animal transformation	accidental baby acquisition	telepathy / mindmeld	genderswap

Figure 5: Screengrab of a fanfiction bingo card from Dreamwidth

Bingo games are largely based on the long-running Kink Bingo.[30] In the last few years, an assortment of Bingo challenges have become popular; the card above is a random

[30] Kink bingo began in 2008. For more information about the game, see their Fanlore page here: http://fanlore.org/wiki/Kink_Bingo

selection from Trope Bingo, a panfandom trope challenge. Another example might be Cotton Candy Bingo, which has prompts designed to help people create fluffy happy stories and which has also become quite popular, but there are lots of these kinds of challenges. To get a bingo, you create a work (usually a text-based story, although some challenges allow or encourage art, crafts, or podficcing as well) for each block. If you get a line across, you get a bingo, and if you fill them all, you get a blackout. Your prize is the delight in creating a lot of fannish works, points you can brag about, and the admiration of your peers. The Bingo challenges run for set times; Trope Bingo round 1, 2013, ran from January 1 to April 30 2013. The community that runs Kink Bingo currently has roughly 1,000 members and subscribers, and the stories produced (which now number in the x0,000s) are frequently very popular outside their direct community. These kinds of community-building challenges are possible because all of the creators and readers involved have a very thorough understanding of the usual patterns for each of these kinds of stories; each square indicates a sort of sub-genre.[31]

Given this emphasis on tropes, the differences between fanfiction and genre fiction might be unclear for someone outside of fandom. Genre fiction has provided many of the tropes used in fandom, and particularly the focus on romantic relationships in fanfiction. The difference is that original genre fiction as a whole isn't pointing to much beyond the tropes themselves. For example, in a detective novel, there is likely to be a hard-living middle-aged white man whose career is on the rocks; he then pursues and captures a bad guy, often with some kind of vigilante justice, restoring his sense of self-worth and/or career. Similarly, in a romance novel, a woman who is under-

[31] "Slash" (the non-canonical homosexual relationship of characters) is the trope most recognized outside of fandom.

appreciated/has gone through a tragedy is likely to meet a man with whom she has some conflict and yet finds attractive; eventually they resolve their differences and the novel ends with their happy relationship. This kind of book is often called formulaic or escapism, but they're very popular.[32] In part, this popularity comes from the knowledge on the part of the reader that the difficulties of the primary character will be overcome. The point of genre fiction is the repetition of the trope in slightly different circumstances.

However, while genre fiction points to itself- the ongoing repetition of the genre itself, with minor variations- fanfiction points to something *outside* of itself. The use of tropes and tags in fanfiction allow the reader to enter into a fic understanding the context by which the author is analyzing their database of canon media. The kind of variations in plot and character apparent in genre fiction is largely unnecessary in fanfiction; the characters already exist,[33] and the general plot of the story is based on popular tropes. So what is left for fanfiction authors to do? This is the question that has allowed fanfiction to go so widely under appreciated, and the same question that makes these texts so valuable for rhetoric scholars. Because these parameters exist, fandom is free to engage in ongoing critical analysis of the source texts, performing the same kind of activity rhet/comp courses continually try to teach.

For example, if a Merlin BBC story (another made up example) takes place in a modern high school alternate universe, we can anticipate that Prince Arthur will the popular leader of the football/rugby/lacrosse/etc. team, Gwen might work for the high school paper, Morgana might be class president/leader of the mean girls and Merlin likely

[32] As they should be. I am not disparaging genre fiction at all.

[33] usually exist. Original main and secondary characters do sometimes appear alongside the canon-based characters, particularly in AUs.

be the new student in school who goes to work for the paper. We can anticipate these characterizations because both the characters themselves and the standards of the trope - the high school au - are so strong. Diverging from these kinds of characterizations would have to be extraordinarily done for the fans of the series to read it; envisioning Arthur as meek or shy is almost impossible given his role in the legend and on the television series. Instead, a Merlin modern high school au can be expected to analyze and critique gender and class as they are depicted in the supposedly medieval period of the television series and as they exist in contemporary high schools.

While genre fiction replicates tropes over and over again, fanfiction uses tropes as jumping off points; they are generative rather than restrictive- they operate as prompts (similar to essay prompts), and they provide a lens of interrogation for the source text. For example, in the BBC's version of Merlin, women are almost always weak, evil, dead, or some combination thereof. In the television series, Morgana's strong will and resistance to Uther's draconian measures against his own people mean that she eventually becomes an enemy of the state. The resulting isolation from her family and loved ones causes her to go insane. In modern alternate universe fics, however, she is frequently depicted as having those same characteristics but in a modern environment, and instead of going mad she is shown as a ruthless and efficient businessperson who effortlessly wraps family and enemies around her finger -running a large charity or company are popular roles for her.

The use of tropes, and the related use of tags, means that the readers and writers are prepared for extraordinarily close readings of the source texts, as well as an ongoing investigation into their community's own use of tropes. Reading and interrogating their

own readings and methods is apparent not only in the ongoing meta-commentary that surrounds fandom practices, but in the sub-genres themselves. One trope in fanfiction that has been popular for many years is the alpha/beta/omega-verse, in which characters are placed in cultures that have the same dynamics we commonly associate with wolf packs, with alphas being dominate over betas and omegas, and having an esteemed and special role in society. These stories frequently include scenes in which an alpha claims a more submissive partner and so on. Recently, however, there have been fics in a/b/o-verses that reverse this order; omegas are especially respected in that culture, while alphas are viewed as less worthy. This revision of the trope operates as a critical inquiry into the trope, and into fandom's use of that trope. Because it is a new revision, readers are forced to think about the sub-genre differently, in much the same way that modern/postmodern authors ask readers to think about their texts. The repeated patterns of fanfiction tropes are a key aspect of this inquiry.

8. Tagging: what it is, how it works, what it does.

Fanfiction also differs from genre fiction in the way that it privileges the interface just as much as it does the database, to return to Manovich's language. What many readers wanted in hypertext fiction was patterning and a rapid way to access the information we desired; the now familiar hallmarks of a well-designed database system. Through its use of tropes and tagging, fanfiction forefronts patterning, privileging it over the closed narratives readers often are expected to want, and replicates the networked structure of the internet. The very aspects that hypertext fiction eschewed are what makes

fanfiction popular, even though it amplifies hypertext's linking structures to concrete outside information, essentially requiring even more work of the reader.

This drawing upon the communal database of genre and pop culture knowledge is made evident in the common titling sequences that frequently accompany fanfiction. For example, here is the titling sequence of "The Student Prince," by Fayjay, located at *The Archive of Our Own*:

Rating: Mature

Archive Warning: Author chose not to use archive warnings

Category: Multi

Fandom: Merlin

Relationships: Arthur/Merlin, various others

Characters: Arthur Pendragon, Merlin Emrys, Gwen (Guinevere), Lancelot du Lac, Morgana, Morgause, Gaius

Additional Tags: modern AU, AU, slash

Stats: Published: 2010-06-03 Completed: 2010-07-10 Words: 145248 Chapters: 35/35 Comments: 633 Bookmarks: 124 Hits: 27780

This titling sequence offers just over the minimum information typically provided for fanfic in western fandoms. Like the cover of a book, it provides important information for a potential reader. While the "rating" and "fandom" categories are self-explanatory, the tag "multi" means there are potentially male/male, female/female, male/female and genderqueer, romantic relationships in the story. "M/M" would have been its place if the plot had focused exclusively on the Arthur/Merlin relationship, or "M/F" if it were about

Arthur/Gwen. If you tag your story inappropriately, or don't (for example) warn for something a community thinks requires warning for, like character death or triggers such as rape, you and/or your work may be banned from the hosting site. Titling sequences frequently include story "notes," which are an extension of the titles, and which include a summary and a thanks to the beta-readers (the term used for peer reviewers)[34]. In this case: "Grateful thanks to Lamardeuse and DarkEmeralds for Beta and cheerleading!" (Fayjay, np). Fics that appear on archiving sites almost always include these standard titles, while fics that appear on personal websites frequently have some version of them, although they can be shortened. A final important point about the titling is the genre notation. As with the example in the previous section, this story is tagged as a modern AU (an alternate universe, meaning it creates a different world for the characters, rather than having the story take place in medieval England, as the series does) and slash, which is a non-canonical homosexual relationship between characters. More specific trope tags, such as "hurt/comfort," "amnesia!fic," "bodyswap," or "curtain!fic" are also common.[35] While it is important to note that it is impossible to adequately describe something as large as fandom, the words and phrases used to describe and tag stories are, again, very common in western fandoms, occurring frequently enough to say that at least at this point in time, they are a key component of the usual method of titling fics.[36]

The tags on a fic, then, provide quite a lot of information about the rhetorical framework the author will pursue in a very small amount of space. Some people might

[34] I'll discuss beta readers more in chapter three, but peer review is a standard and important part of fannish productions.

[35] See the glossary for descriptions of each of these.

[36] For example, there are currently (03/23/15) 641 variations on the hurt/comfort tag on the ao3. "Emotional hurt/comfort" is tagged on 15, 592 fics. The broader "hurt/comfort" tag is used on 67,595 fics.

say that the same work is done by book covers, especially in genre fiction, and of course they have a similar function. As I said in the introduction, fanfiction isn't an entirely new genre, but a genre that is currently popular for its emphasis on certain aspects of stories. But fanfiction titles vary from genre fiction covers because the characters of the story are already well-known by the reader. Instead of knowing that the young lady heroine will be rescued from her terrible situation, as we do in romance novels, we know Arthur's very particular way of dragging out Merlin's name when he's annoyed, his obnoxious and ongoing self-aggrandizement that is a cover for his daddy issues, his feelings regarding his step-sister - in short, nearly everything about his personality and life in the canon. The trope tags signal which aspects of the canon the fic is linking to.

Similarly, in a traditional scholarly essay, the kind of work done by tags in fanfiction might be done in the title, especially after a colon; by signposting throughout a text in directional sentences – "now I will talk about x;" and by the kind of signposting that occurs through namedropping, as I did in the earlier section on hypertext when I said "a statement that will resonate with readers of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who conceptualized thought as rhizomatic rather than as hierarchical." In fanfiction, however, because of tagging, the reader frequently knows before they even begin the story a great deal about what is going to happen and how it is going to happen.

The recent trend toward using Tumblr rather than a static archiving site like The Archive of Our Own or Livejournal highlights the long-standing use of this type of tagging. Tumblr's software prevents the use of commas and periods in its tags, which has led to the development of its own tagging conventions. Because a Tumblr is viewed as a personal space that is public, rather than a public storage space like the Archive of Our

Own, users employ idiosyncratic tags that reflect their personality, their awareness of Tumblr linguistic practices, and engage in conversation with other people through tags. In practice, this means a fic tag set on Tumblr sometimes looks like this:

> #ahahahahaha #hm13 #fic #so embarrassed #/runs away #this may be the fluffiest thing i've ever written #(which i guess says something about me) #anyway sorry this is crappy sorry for the typos etc. but can't reread it right now /o\ #hope you're going to like it siyu /o\ #a thing #meme #meme fill #sparklesgirl .(np)
> sessho.tumblr.com/post/3705208974

When this kind of tagging is moved over to public spaces, it prompts people more used to traditional tagging (even if they are themselves Tumblr users) to say things like:

> Dear AO3 authors: STOP TAGGING LIKE YOU'RE ON FUCKING TUMBLR. It really really pisses me off when people make dumb as shit useless tags on their AO3 fic. Goddamn it, use the authors notes or summary space and stop being so bloody obnoxious.
> #Porn
> #attempted porn at least
> #Plot What Plot/Porn Without Plot
> #except for a little bit
> #eventually all the characters are gonna be tagged
> #Established Relationship

#post-movies

#how relationships work

#or rather how relationships are not all fluff and rainbows even if you're in love

#so many food feels

#Dreams

#Communication Failure

#That Awkward Moment When No One Really Knows What's Going On But Everyone Wants To Think They Do, #Overbearing Brother-Types Complicating Life FTW, #Previously Unconfronted Issues, #Loki Is Incapable Of 'Casual' Relationships Of Any Kind, #No One Knows Why Loki Does Any Damn Thing Not Even Loki Himself, #Except For When He Does, #'I Do What I Want' Is Not A Valid And Acceptable Excuse In Sigyn's Book, #Fierce Females FTW, #But Who Do You Turn To When YOU'RE The Sassy Gay Friend?, #Odin's A+ Parenting, #Frigga's C+ Parenting Now With Extra Credit Option, #Being Barely-An-Adult Is Exhausting And Confusing, #Like Walking Blindly Through A Desert As Someone Feeds You Chocolate While Robbing You, #How Anyone Copes With It Is A Mystery

You're all obnoxious as fuck. GTFO and go to FF.net or some other shithole. (np, original formatting)

Even when these kinds of tags are used in addition to the standard tagging, when found on public or communal sites, they tend to arouse ire in many readers. That this kind of insistence on codification occurs in the internet-based fiction isn't surprising. As readers, we need to be able to search for our favorite kind of story quickly. If tagging were haphazard, we could never find what we were looking for (indeed, Tumblr itself is nearly unsearchable. It is a far more transient digital space). A random search for "Harry Potter fanfiction slash" returns only two million results, but even so, finding the story you like could be challenging**.**

More importantly, though, the titling is a reflection of the way the internet functionality forms the heart of fanfiction. As almost everyone knows, information on the internet, or even simply on computers, is never what it appears to be; it is always something else, a string of ones and zeros covered with a façade amenable to our tastes. This foundation to our interactive systems means that no matter what we do with computers, we know we are working with raw material that could easily be transformed into something else. Behind every fanfiction story is matter, data, that can be shifted into something entirely different with only a few keystrokes, and the heavy reliance on tropes in the fic and conventions in its titling makes clear the very materiality of digitized works. That is, fan fic writing and reading reflects the thought processes and actions we are trained to perform by our interactions with the internet. Tagging allows you to find a lot of other *Harry Potter* stories, or a lot of *Harry Potter* stories that focus on Luna, or *Harry Potter* stories that are modern crossovers with the *James Bond* franchise, or anything else you can imagine.

9. Patterns Part II

The use of tropes in fanfiction brings us back around to reading for pattern. Franco Moretti argues in *An Atlas of a European Novel 1800-1900* that certain kinds of stories are dependent upon a certain kind of space, that genre is local. If we consider his arguments that "each space determines its own kind of actions" (84) and "without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible" (100). As a result of virtual spaces, fanfiction begins to make sense. If stories and genres are dependent upon the location and custom of a particular space, as Moretti suggests, what happens to genres when we strip away the idea of a discrete space, as we do when we talk about stories on the internet? The stories themselves reflect the infinitude of the spaces in which they're born. Tagging stories is only possible because fanfiction relies on tropes and patterns, and because its readers are trained to read for pattern. Stories that do not meet the pattern expected, whether because they mislabeled or do not follow the tropes indicated in the tags, are frequently dismissed as inexpert or unsatisfying by their communities. These kinds of complaints are similar to the complaints made about early hypertext fiction, as we saw earlier.

Reading the internet well means that you are good at reading and searching for patterns, because patterns lead to strong connections between links and sources of information. Anyone who has searched unsuccessfully for something online knows the frustration that emerges when your friend finds that same thing in a matter of minutes. The person who found something is a better reader and writer of patterns that reflect the internet's logic. We have been trained to negotiate sets of databases using commonly used interface tags.

In *How We Think*, N. Katherine Hayles argues that databases have become the primary mode of contemporary communication. Her analysis relies on Alan Liu's separation of form and content; that is, that websites (front-end access to knowledge), can change a lot and give radically different sets of information and forms, based upon the databases upon which they draw (back-end access to knowledge). In Hayles' theory, databases are dematerialized and standardized, while narratives have "the opposite qualities of embeddedness and causal linkages" (202). To read a database, she says, we decode and encode clues within a narrative, which is a very different thing than a database.

To demonstrate how these database-driven narratives work, Hayles analyzes *The Raw Shark Texts* (S. Hall 2007) and Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (2007). Both of these print texts rely on what we might easily call traditional modernist aesthetics, applied and developed through machines. Both invoke images and texts-in-image shape (words in the shape of a whale, in a grid, and so on), extensive internal geographies, and the kind of internal references to themselves that would be just as at home in works by James Joyce or B.S. Johnson. Throughout her analysis, Hayles emphasizes the complicated nature of the internal referents these texts provide; indeed, they might be out of reach of the casual reader. In contrast, fan fiction is widely derided because it is considered to be "easy to read." What it does, though, is the exact same motions as the complex reading tasks required to get through *Only Revolutions, The Raw Shark Texts*, or even *Ulysses*. Even a very simple fic like "The Eagle of Truthiness," described earlier, relies on intensive in-text references to multiple sources and a deep understanding of the machine-driven relationship between story and medium.

If one writes using a database, the process of writing itself becomes recursive. Hayles describes database-driven work as offering "both a richer context and a challenge to the reader" than traditional flat text narratives "with the payoff being an enhanced, subtler, and richer sense of the topic's complexities" (38). If database writing is composite writing that offers a greater introduction to a topic's complexities, and we believe that fanfiction is a kind of database writing, then we have to ask why, when this kind of reading is supposedly so difficult, fanfiction is simultaneously so widely disparaged and incredibly popular.

10. Conclusion

New media texts are modular. As Johndan Johnson-Eilola puts it, they are "fragmented objects in circulation, as elements within constantly configured and shifting networks," not so that they resist connection, as they were used in hypertext fiction, but as texts that are "broken down in order to reconnect them, over and over again" (208). As we read fic, we pull these modular pieces together, uncovering the underlying logic and algorithm of the story, the kind of work Manovich says is required of game players. While Manovich asserts narratives and databases are natural enemies, reading fanfiction as a new media object rather than as a print-based narrative placed on a screen allows us to shift the emphasis in reading and writing these kinds of texts. In their repetitive, trope-driven, highly-organized and readily searchable features, fanfiction replicates not the unique, creative, organic, individual genius, that has been lauded as markers "good storytelling" for so long, but are a physical representation of our adaptation to the internet. The structure of fanfiction imitates the structures of the mediums used to build

it, to write it. It forefronts its own medium in the very ways we valorize in the most complicated postmodern texts.

Fan fiction authors and readers look at their texts as playable media - and because of the simultaneously critical and loving eye they turn upon their source texts, those source themselves are also viewed as playable media. Not ever something to be accepted wholesale, or as something complete in itself, but as something to do something else with. In this way, reading fanfiction then is always a rhetorical exercise, the kind of "sophisticated digital scholarly practice" Kathleen Fitzpatrick imagines could appear from widespread acceptance of texts as modular, remixable objects (100).

"Sampling is a new way of doing something that has been around for a long time: creating with found objects. The rotation gets thick, restraints get thin**.** The mix breaks free of the old associations. New contexts form from old. The script gets flipped. The languages evolve and learn to speak in new forms, new thoughts. The sound of thought becomes legible again at the edge of new meanings." -DJ Spooky, *Rhythm Science* (25)

Chapter Two: Reading Databases

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades rhetoric and composition studies definitions of both writing and texts have expanded dramatically. The linking structure of web-based work makes the overlap of remix, new media literacy, and composition nearly inevitable. These overlaps have led to diverse definitions of what rhetoric and composition scholars mean when we use the term "remix." In particular, visual and aural communities have several different terms that refer to what we might call remix: pastiche, cutting, mashups, and versioning, just to name a few, are all terms frequently used to describe remix practices. In this dissertation I'm following Kyle Stedman in using "remix in a broad sense, as an overarching term that includes any act of composition that involves the deliberate manipulation of previous passages, clips, or samples throughout a majority of the work" (108). While there's further work that can be done in examining how these specialties are represented, particularly within different sub-genres of fanfiction, given the limitations of space my goal here is to begin to sketch out how fanfiction's practices and genre rules align it with the shift in composition studies over the last decade.

Rather than describe fanfiction as responding to a deficit, as a reaction, for example, of a lack of power in public media, I want to consider it as a pleasure, perhaps even as an excessive pleasure. Thinking of media as the pleasure of creation isn't unusual, including (or especially) new media. Digital rhetoric scholars have talked about the pleasure of remixing, especially in visual and aural texts. In this chapter I will describe how remix practices have been studied in aural arguments, how they are read, and how those same practices can be seen in fanfiction. I will then examine how some of these techniques have been deployed in video game studies, which sometimes rely on the same kind of tropes and navigation practices as aural and visual remixed work, but in alphabetic forms. In each of these genres of study, we see that the reason players, listeners, and creators return time and again to these kinds of work is because they enjoy not only each individual product/project, but the ways in which those projects reference the shared history of the genre, other users, and other individual texts. A similar kind of enjoyment through effort is apparent in fanfiction.

2. Remix Literacy: Who Speaks

A 2006 special issue of *Computers and Composition* draws attention to this expansion into different kinds of writing; the editors point to a rise in multiliteracies scholarship from 1999 onward, saying "we've moved—as a field—from linguistic to visual meaning-making, all in digital environments; so, a logical progression is to include other modes of meaning including audio. In doing so, we hope to provide readers with an overview of how a multiliteracies approach that incorporates attention to audio is possible within composition studies" (263). That is, as they say, from the 1980s to the early 1990s,

the focus of digital literacy research was primarily text-based, looking closely at hypertext fiction and the multitude of ways digital and internet-based texts impacted the classroom. The late 90s and first years of the 2000's were focused on visual literacy as images became more easily accessible in digital spaces, and from the early 2000s until the present we have looked at and listened to sound studies and literacies, neatly coinciding with the development of sites like Napster (1999) and YouTube (2005-6). And so new media scholarship in the digital humanities, as is well known, includes all kinds of mixed and multimedia rhetorics. In the briefest of examples, each of the following texts has essays on a variety of subjects, of which I will only list a few: *Literacy, Technology, and Society* (1997) examines cyborgs, comics, and the fear of large networks, *Teaching Literature and Language Online* (2009) is primarily focused on pedagogical software, 2010's *Media Literacy* discusses video games, YouTube videos, and elementary school projects. *New Media Literacies and Participatory Popular Culture Across Borders* (2012) has essays on manga, memes, Facebook, social gaming and the role of online networks in the development of national identities.

Articles in *Computers and Composition* on remix literacy over the last decade likewise covered a broad range of topics, from website design (Dilger), copyright concerns in digital environments (Meese, DeVoss and Webb), political remix videos on YouTube (Dubisar and Palermi, Carter and Arroyo) and assessment of digital projects (Rice), just to name a few. This scholarship emphasizes that we should expand our understanding of writing. Because so much recent work is focused on extending the definition of writing and developing new literacy and pedagogy practices, over the last

several years text-based multimodal work has in some ways been more limited than sound and visual studies. [37]

3. Reading Remix

The epigraph to this chapter is from *Rhythm Science*, Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid's 2004 pamphlet/art piece/sound file/artifact that was very well received by digital rhetoric scholars. *Rhythm Science* argues for a critical reading of new media and popular culture as an ongoing push of indeterminacy, a reading of culture that allows for building new sites of inquiry and different perspectives; it follows Lev Manovich's statement that prefaces Chapter One - that new media is not total a departure from old media, but an affordance that emphasizes new aspects of existing materials. Drawing heavily on literary and linguistic theory, Miller reminds us that all language is an un-fixed process, and that "the best DJ's are griots, and whether their stories are conscious or unconscious, narratives are implicit in the sampling idea. Every story leads to another story to another story to another story" (21). *Rhythm Science* is important because it argues for reading music, particularly heavily sampled/cut/dj-ed music, the same way we read written or flat texts. Throughout the text Miller samples Baudrillard, The Wu-Tang Clan, William Carlos Williams, and Gilles Deleuze to build a document that performs a text-based mixtape on sound theory and the contemporary consciousness in a flat-text environment. These citations are, as he says, "Lego building blocks of consciousness in a

[37] See Jody Shipka's *Toward a Composition Made Whole* (2011), Cynthia Selfe's *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* (2007), and particularly Jason Palermi's *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy* (2012) for more comprehensive reviews of rhetoric and composition's long history with multimodal and remix writing practices.

world that moves under the sign of continuous transformation and atomized perspectives" (32), in a world where "myth and code are just two sides of the same coin" (16).[38]

DJ Spooky's line of argument has been picked up and extended by many other scholars interested in the rhetorics of sound.[39] Mickey Hess, in urging composition instructors to incorporate sound into their classroom assignments, says that "Rather than copying the original source, hip-hop producers critique and respond to the original through juxtaposition, parody, and direct commentary. Sampling, therefore, is like academic citation systems in that it builds upon existing texts by making new connections and responding to them with new ideas" (283). Jim Rice likewise draws attention to the strength of argument and invention in hip hop, saying that DJs "stitch together various sounds and moments that an audience might not initially associate as worth juxtaposing… Even if a writer's knowledge of the samples is scant or merely sampled, it is not important; the showing off is in the dare to mix these items in the first place" (274). And Jim Brown asks that we pay attention to the speed with which artists like GirlTalk and DJ Spooky demonstrate their aural arguments; arguing that the speed of their compositions is writing which is "an attempt to write with the resources of both *dromos*

[38] Have I sampled him enough? Gone on too long? Let the wavelength of someone else's consciousness run through my arms and into my keyboard? Is adopting his sentence structure for three sentences transformative or sampling or too imitative for that? I'm not sure. What I do know is that his work -as much of a joy as it is -is significant because it had to be written at all. Rhythm Science is as much autobiography and a statement of the artist's purpose as it is anything else, an argument for his own authority in bringing a conversation on sound to new media theory in English departments particularly, gaining him additional academic credit that let him bring projects to Earth Day and Antarctica. Miller's book is a powerful demonstration of sampling and boundary breaking; it is unthinkable that an English scholar would produce such a text - it can't count for tenure. DJ Spooky, of course, has the benefit of not giving a fuck.

[39] see also as representative articles: Rickert & Salvo 2006, Johnson-Eilola & Selber 2007, and Koehler 2010 just to name a few.

and *schole*…attuned to the speeds of various rhetorical environments, and able to slow down or speed up as necessary," a cutting method that draws attention to those juxtapositions in nuanced ways (83). These kinds of arguments are often grounded in readings of William S. Burroughs' cut-up technique, and so pay close attention to the alignment of remixed texts and the productive tension that emerges from what users expect to come next in a phrase and their reaction to what occurs instead. However, it can be useful to see *how* readers and listeners get from each node of alignment to another. What makes them willing to continually engage in this tension? That is, what makes a text successful, assuming that successful means read and re-read?

Adam Banks offers one answer to this question, describing the kind of collage and negotiation that occurs in hip hop music as centered on the scratch. He says:

> [t]he scratch is an interruption. It breaks the linearity of the text, the progressive circularity of the song. It takes the listener back and forth through the song, underneath the apparatus that plays it, either to insert some other song or for the sheer pleasure of the sound of the scratch itself. What was noise, what was seen as the sign of a broken record or stylus, an unwelcome interruption…became pleasurable. (1-2)

Banks's theory is useful for considering digital texts because it recognizes that as we listen to a remixed song, a large part of the joy we feel occurs through reading the text, recognizing the play of references and interpretations, looking at (and listening to) the way the creator is changing the stories that came before. The conscious choosing and arranging of texts by the creator is part of the pleasure of the listening experience. This

kind of reading is distinctly different than listening to an original composition, or one that tries to be completely original. It is also different that reading texts primarily based on the cut, because Banks recognizes the path that comes between references. The noise of disruption, the gap in narrative, is just as important as the texts it links. While many theories of aural remix focus on the moment of intersection between texts, Banks's work tilts those theories slightly to draw attention to the spaces that appear on either side of those intersections. **The disruption here isn't a gap but a bridge**. By valuing the scratch and paying attention to the potential it offers, we can expand our reading of remixed texts past cut-ups and into what Tricia Rose says are "principles for a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation," texts that "create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them" (cited in Banks, 30). Reading the gap, the scratch, provides room for developing more thorough narrative shifts, more transforming work, because it is always focused on the moment of transition.[40]

After its immense academic popularity in the 1990s, digital fiction, especially text-based fiction, has received relatively little attention outside of research on L2 learners (see: Hirvela, Thorne, Black and Sykes).This neglect is in part due to the ways in which much of the available text-based fiction doesn't always appear to fit the multi-linear, multimodal, multimedia format we expect from web texts.[41] As I described in the previous chapter, fanfiction might appear to be a replication of flat text on a plain printed page. In the following section I will describe how it operates as a multimodal genre, and

[40] We can also think of this as a positive reading of what might otherwise be considered a failure or flaw.

[41] It also follows the decline of the conversation around including fictional texts in rhetoric classes.

how other, more familiar remix techniques can help us understand and use fanfiction as part of a comprehensive digital rhetoric program.

Fanfiction operates in this same genre but goes further than simply placing texts against each other. Reading fic as a scratch is useful because it moves us beyond reading fic as "just" remix or "just" resistant texts. I want to be a little careful here because I don't want to appropriate or disregard the important and ongoing work into hip hop and especially its importance for Black and African American writing, and also because much of the scholarship on fanfiction (especially early work), focuses on fanfiction as a rebellious act, a way for women in particular to write stories for themselves that they didn't see in popular media. This is indubitably true. The importance and power of fandoms, especially for underrepresented populations (i.e., anyone other than white men) is phenomenal. And yet, what happens when we look at fanfiction as not only a very necessary power grab - a relationship that through its very metaphors places fanfiction and fandom as secondary to the canon texts, but as a genre based on play, on building outward? Not as just reading the gap as silence, a hole to be filled, but as a deliberate use of scratching.[42]

Scratch is grounded in a belief that there will always be excess noise and gaps, and that the blurred and often disregarded lines are the *source* of creative and critical work. In fic, the moments of a noise occur when readers are brought up against the external sources of canon they recognize and the way those sources are being changed. The scratch - the thing that so many alphabetic-text writers have been trained to try to eliminate, is the most important part of the work. In both fiction and non-fiction

[42] The gendered implications of this phrasing are deliberate.

alphabetic writing, authors are compelled to create smooth texts that hide or elide the seams in the work. In fiction originality (the hiding of influences and references) is prized. In non-fiction work, authors are trained to develop "clarity," by which editors usually mean adhering to another set of unspoken rules and audience expectations. In non-fiction academic work we find something that is slightly closer to fic through the use of extensive citations, as I described in chapter one, but even there the great attention paid to smooth transitions, for example, relies upon an idea of a complete and polished work. The conversation in composition, particularly, about these implicit rules, has been ongoing for decades. In 1990, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford asked us to examine what authorship meant, and why "our culture has systematically (if unconsciously) emphasized those aspects of the writing process that involve individual, rather than group, effort" (73). They also ask why commercial products that are the result of collaborative work, such as instruction manuals, often remain unattributed, while in fictional work like poems, authorship is highly valued (72). These values, they say, go back to Enlightenment ideals of individuality. But despite the widespread acknowledgment of the value of collaborative work, rhetoric and composition still struggle, at a pragmatic level, how to create and assess assignments where invention, collaboration, and attribution productively collide. I'll discuss this more thoroughly in chapter three, but fanfiction offers us one fairly straightforward way into these classroom conversations.

In hip hop & dj-ing, the scratch is echoing proof of the process in the product, the voice that has created the moment, a shared presence in what might be an otherwise solitary moment. The scratch is *evidence* of the moment of joining two texts together; it draws attention to itself. It also allows us to recognize fic as a genre that emphasizes that

gaps can never be filled or completed, that users (reader and writers) expect and want there to be space for interminable filling. These are spaces for playing with raw materials, for anticipating what kinds of joins we can create. This move toward other options is present in heavily mixed music, as Banks, Miller, and many rhetoric scholars have pointed out, but it is also apparent in text-based forms in digital games, as I will describe in the next section. A text this size is unable to fully explore the rich scholarship on remix and video games. But narrative-based video games and remixed music help us get to the heart of some of the fundamental questions of digital rhetoric: if we live through language, is all interactivity story-telling? Is all interactivity a game? Are all users making real choices? These are questions that have driven both new media and video game research. While digital narrative games offer what is, in some ways, a more remedial form of sampling than either aural texts or fanfiction, their simple structure readily allows us to examine remix in a text-based form. Understanding their structure helps us understand fanfiction's more complex literacies.

4. The Maze

Early on, scholars considered stories like Michael Joyce's *Afternoon* and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, texts that were developed for early world wide web access and digital platforms like Storyspace. These groundbreaking works seemed to put into practice the poststructuralist ideas predominate in narrative research during the period, taking advantage of the newly available linking mechanisms to provide a new kind of authority and praxis for readers. Recognizing the difference between digital reading and flat text reading, new media literacy scholars have used a variety of terms that indicate

the level of interaction readers have with digital narrative, frequently drawing on spatial and navigational metaphors: Espen Aarseth calls hypertext fiction a sub-type of ergodic literatures, which are "open, dynamic texts where the reader must perform specific actions to generate a literary sequence which may vary for every reader" (*Cybertext* 19). Janet Murray describes spaces wherein audiences could participate and modify dialog or spaces very nearly like the current big story-based games, calling them "cyberdramas" and "game-story" (271). Science fiction author Neal Stephenson suggests "ractive" as a term to describe the emerging narrative structure. Despite their imaginative and technical quality, hypertext fiction didn't achieve commercial success outside of academic settings, primarily because readers found them difficult to navigate, and they disliked the jarring experience of dislocation in the reading experience.[43]

After the relative demise of hypertext fiction, digital narrative theory, lacking more contemporary examples, turned largely to game studies.[44] As hypertext fiction was already beginning to fade in the late eighties and early nineties, video games were exploding with new narrative methods and have continued to push on the boundaries of our understanding of just how reading and writing stories works. There are obvious and not-so-obvious differences and alignments between games and stories. One key difference is the multilinear quality of most story-based game play and the non-linear structure of hypertext fiction. *Afternoon* is over when the reader tires of it; a conclusion in the traditional sense is almost impossible. In digital games there is usually a clear ending,

[43] See Thomas, 2007, and chapter one.

[44] I want to be clear here by what I mean by "narrative," because as is well known the definition of the term has shifted to include many formats, including (but not limited to) film, music, and dance, as rhetoric has become more inclusive. In this section I am referring to the kinds of stories told orally or with written texts on a page or screen.

but despite their causal structure, the stories in narrative-based games have multiple side quests and variations. The theoretical shift from hypertext fiction back to games made sense; early hypertext fiction theory had been built around the ideas of play, as had the internet itself. Tim Berners-Lee says that he designed ENQUIRE, the predecessor to the world wide web, specifically to "store snippets of information and to link related pieces together in any way. To find information, one progressed via the links from one sheet to another, rather like in the old computer game 'Adventure'" (cited in Monfort, 225). "Adventure" was one of the first digital platform games called Interactive Fiction games.[45]

5. Interactive Fiction

Pig lost! Boss say that it Grunk fault. Say Grunk forget about closing gate. Maybe boss right. Grunk not remember forgetting, but maybe Grunk just forget. Boss say Grunk go find pig, bring it back. Him say, if Grunk not bring back pig, not bring back Grunk either. Grunk like working at pig farm, so now Grunk need find pig.

Outside

Grunk think that pig probably go this way. It hard to tell at night time, because moon not bright as sun. There forest to east and north. It even darker there, and Grunk hear lots of strange animal. West of Grunk, there big field with little stone wall. Farm back to south.

>

The cursor demands attention. What should we tell Grunk to do?

[45] You can play Adventure on a simulated 1983 computer screen here: http://www.amctv.com/shows/halt-and-catch-fire/colossal-cave-adventure/landing

Outside

Grunk think that pig probably go this way. It hard to tell at night time, because moon not bright as sun. There forest to east and north. It even darker there, and Grunkhear lots of strange animal. West of Grunk, there big field with little stone wall. Farm back to south.

>look in field

Grunk look across empty field, but not see any pig.

The field is a logical place to look; poor Grunk! In Interactive Fiction games (hereafter IF) like *Lost Pig*, players are given a short narrative puzzle, and then enter brief commands such as (but not limited to) "look," "pick up," or "go" to move their character (in this case, Grunk) through the puzzle. "Move" deserves its own set of qualifications; in IF there are no visible characters in the way there are in video games or even tabletop games, where a player might often have images in guidebooks for various character types. In IF the characters are described in broadest strokes, and it is the narrative and game play's responsibility to intrigue the user enough that they will continue playing. In *Lost Pig*, if the player goes through the prompts properly,[46] eventually Grunk does find the pig and retains his pleasant job at the pig farm. There are many different types of Interactive Fiction games, prompting one scholar to say "In reality, there is not a universal understanding of what interactive fiction is or what it should entail" (Haunstetter vii). But despite their differences, IF games share the common game structure as I described above.[47]

[46] That is, for a definition of properly - as in most games, error has its own recompense, but in IF games you are quite likely to be returned to the same prompt again and again. This is quite different to more recent RPGs, in which decision making might take you to a different part of a story rather than returning you to a repeat of the narrative.

[47] For more interactive fiction games, go to: http://pr-if.org/play/

Grunk's dilemma is also a narrative, but what kind? It is different than novels, poems, and even Choose Your Own Adventure™ books, although it shares some of the attributes of these more traditional book-like genres. But given its strongly text-and-story based foundation, it seems to share more qualities with those than it does our familiar board and card games. One of the differences between these kinds of narrative games and more traditional modes of text-based storytelling is a shift in emphasis from linearity and the "integrity" of a story to the movement of the reader through the text. Roland Barthes describes the pleasure of narrative as emerging from "the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface; I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again" (13). This kind of interaction, which is such an important part of (post)modernist and hypertext fiction, is vividly apparent in text-based digital games; IF games increase exposure to this kind of abrasion. The users' co-writing of their own textual experience requires we spend time with it in ways that are different than traditional narratives that lead us rather straightforwardly from beginning to end, from front cover to back cover. To put it another way, IF user Roger Sorolla wrote in 1996 that:

> The pleasure [of IF] comes from kibitzing along with the problem-solving methods of the detective, the starship pilot, or the explorer. The clever reader may even try to work out a solution on his own, based on the clues in the narrative. Then, even more fun can be had by comparing one's own problem-solving efforts to those of the protagonist, and to the solution that is eventually revealed." (2)

Game scholar Marie-Laure Ryan finds connections between adventures like Grunk's and traditional narrative structures. *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001) and *Avatars of Story* (2006) draw attention to the idea that players experience games as narrative activities; pointing to the quest narratives, narratives of emergence and narratives of discovery popular in many role-playing games, as well as the extensive world-building required to involve a player in even the most basic of game structures. Lev Manovich also finds the connection between video games and narrative compelling; like Henry Jenkins' later analysis of fanfiction, Manovich draws on Michel de Certeau's theory of strategy and tactics to describe the ways in which players interact with *Doom* and *Myst,* identifying them as creating their own version of the game as they play through (245). Manovich aligns the action, narrative, and visual aspects of games, pointing out that the player must look for visual cues and then perform actions for the game narrative to move forward (247). He makes this alignment explicit in his description of the database: "Just like the game player, the reader of a novel gradually reconstructs the algorithm [of the text]" (225). In these games the user's writing contributes to the building of the text; they are writing and reading it simultaneously. They have become quite close to the wreader, prosumer, or co-author that was posited by Richard Lanham (1993), George Landow (1997), Dan Anderson (2003), and other early hypertext scholars as they considered the possibilities of writing in digital environments, a reader that shared writing responsibilities with the author of a text.

However, IF has many connections to writing traditional or hypertext fiction. The continual return of the user to the same space upon giving the wrong direction to their character operates as a textual loop or sample, putting IF into a middle ground between

remix and hypertext. As Nick Monfort points out, this kind of writing is "not adding marginalia for later personal use or for some other reader's future reference," but disappears when you move from location to location (4).The ephemerality of this work, then, is somewhat similar to the hypertext fiction user experience; the user creates their own paths through the story, but the codex remains hidden, and disappears nearly the instant it occurs. This tendency of IF stories to exist in constant waiting and disappearance prompts Monfort to call IF a "potential narrative" (23) or "potential literature" (26). IF games are, in many ways, not Schrodinger's Cat, but Alice's Cheshire Cat.[48] The genre conventions assure you the cat is there, but he lurks invisibly, waiting to act on you and disrupt your careful plans. But despite the blinking disappearance of the player and the game's presence, IF games nonetheless offer considerably plainer paths to a conclusion than hypertext fiction does.

6. RPGs

Digital Role Playing Games (hereafter RPGs) are the more visually advanced cousins of IF games, and they are also frequently more fully developed stories than IF games. Like IF games, they offer plenty of options for text-based story-telling, interactive reader/user experiences, and text-based remix. There are several different types of digital RPGs, including games in which the player is offered only plot, and designs all of their character's experiences from scratch, games in which characters are completely secondary to plot, games which can be played alone or those which require live-time companions. In this chapter I will look at single-player role playing games. Multiplayer

[48] Alice's famous Cheshire Cat, of course, is one where "the animal has become separated from the properties that constitute a cat" (Musser, np).

and cooperative RPGs have been widely studied, but single player games are structured very differently, and are in many ways more similar to remixed and sampled texts we see in other mediums. Analyses of games like *World of Warcraft* have typically focused on in-game play and narrative, the interaction of player and NPC's, and the relationships between groups of players, as well as the complexities of self-identifying as a fan of the games. Scholars such as Constance Steinkuehler have also examined the role of online gaming forums, where players trade information about game play, in and out of school, as self-sponsored literacy activities. There has also been a great deal of work done on the embodied experiences of players, especially in RPGS. Ian Bogost famously argues for the procedural rhetoric of video games, that they give players "arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models" (29) and James Paul Gee says that video games "situate meaning in a multimodal space through embodied experiences to solve problems and reflect on the intricacies of the design of imagined worlds and the design of both real and imagined social relationships in the modern world" (48), I will talk more about the embodied experiences of digital narratives in chapter three, focusing here on the text-based aspects of popular video game RPGs.

Story-based RPGs, with their repetitive game and narrative structures, have recently become extraordinarily popular, indicating a change in the kind of game structure being valued by the market. After years of First Person Shooter (FPS) and Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games being at the top of the charts, two of the biggest-selling games between 2010 and 2014 were *Mass Effect* and the *Dragon Age.* These series games rely on extensive world-building, user buy-in to fictional narratives, and

developing bonds between characters through extensive conversations to further the game. Between 2007 and 2012, the *Mass Effect* series sold over 10mm units,[49] while *Dragon Age* sold more than 3mm in its first year alone. Although extensive research has been done on RPGs, for the purposes of this chapter I will use these two exemplary games to only point to some of the particular reading and writing strategies that appear in digital RPGs and how they can help us understand why they are also present in other kinds of digital narratives.

Like in *World of Warcraft* and the tabletop game *Dungeons and Dragons*, in *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* players can choose a background, gender, and class for their character, and these choices have profound implications for the game play. Throughout the games non-player characters (characters that have been programmed to interact with player's characters, hereafter NPCs) react to your character differently based upon their birth and job status. For example, in *Mass Effect*, the character Commander Shepard is famous, and everyone knows her personal history. Earthborn Shepard had a rough childhood, is known for having a bad temper and an abrasive tone, and comes with bonus "renegade" points, which opens up more aggressive options to players earlier in the game. By contrast, the Spacer Shepard was raised in a military family and is following in her father's footsteps; she starts with bonus "paragon" points. Colonist Shepard narrowly escaped being slaughtered when her town was raided by slavers, and was rescued by the

[49] In 2012, the xbox version of *ME3* was the 15th most popular game in the world, selling about 2.6mm copies. For reference, *Call of Duty: Black Ops* sold nearly 20mm copies on its combined xbox and playstation platforms. *Mass Effect*'s performance is especially notable in comparison: *CoD* has supported multiplayer since its beginning in 2003, and has released a new edition of the game every year since 2006. It is the most popular game in the world, with over 100mm units sold.It does not include narrative, focusing almost entirely on game play mechanics.

military. Some characters in the game trust Colonist Shepard's judgment more because of her personal history, seeing her as more pragmatic than other versions of the character, while Earthborn Shepard is considered reckless. Similarly, in *Dragon Age* entire communities are openly racist; if you play as an Elf, you'll be viewed with suspicion in many areas of the game world.

There are three aspects of these story-type RPGs that help us understand them as text-based remix literacies. First, like their more straightforward predecessors such as Super Mario Bros, sections of these big games are meant to be replayed instantly. When your character is killed, you get another life so you can try that level or fight again. If you dislike an NPCs response, you can replay the conversation, essentially editing and rewriting your story on the spot. Second, that the character type can be dramatically different in different play-throughs, and yet still be the "same" character operating in the same universe. Although their experiences *within* game sequences are somewhat different, every version of Shepard is sent on the same three major missions that will help save the galaxy. That this variation would appear to be so popular in narrative-based games is intriguing. It points to a cultural acceptance of strong variety in story characters that is quite different than we expect in other kinds of stories like novels or films, where characters remain roughly the same throughout their in-world experiences. Tellingly, these varieties of game characters are not considered derivative, or as the sort of two-dimensional characters provided by other kinds of genre fiction such as the romance hero or the hardbitten detective, but are an expected part of the game experience.

Third, both IF and these kinds of RPGs games are *read*. In IF games, players read the narrative puzzles and then can choose from the standard text-based play options of

"look" "go," and so forth. In RPGs the player can choose from a series of on-screen dialogue options to move their characters through the game when talking to other characters; these options are generally split into positive, neutral, and positive responses, although there may be several different types of each category depending upon how one has played the game. While this story building is multimodal, obviously amplified by the video and audio features of the game, the dialogue selections are always read onscreen, and in some RPGs the main player character's voice is never heard - your dialogue is completely silent, is text based only, while the NPCs are voiced by actors.

The dialogue options in these sweeping story-based games show some commonality with other kinds of digital writing. The narrative choices offered by these kinds of games would be/are familiar to hypertext readers and IF users; the player clicks a choice, and is taken to a new narrative location beyond their control. While players have some control over their gaming experience (and if one follows a game guide precisely, it is possible to know exactly how your character's story will proceed) a player can also choose to pursue their own paths through the game, creating at least in part what early hypertext theorists like George Landow imagined digital fiction looked like; stories that are "broken up, open, …unstable, multilinear, created in the act of reading, multiple." (243). As in IF games, because players of these kinds of games are arguably writing the stories they want to read and inhabit; they are very close to the interactive (w)reader hypertext theorists imagined. And like hypertext fiction readers, they are building a story based on pieces of pre-created texts over which they have varying but relatively limited control.

But these kinds of games differ from both hypertext fiction and IF games, because they create narratives that Marie-Laure Ryan calls the "ideal top-down design," a kind of

story that can "disguise itself as an emergent story, giving users both confidence that their efforts will be rewarded by a coherent narrative and the feeling of their own free will" (*Storyworlds* 99). The idea that the narrative provides the idea of a reader's free will is significant, because in both hypertext fiction and video games the narrative experience is quite tightly controlled. For example, *Mass Effect* is particularly notable for its use of a dialogue wheel. While dialogue wheels are now a widely used (if still sometimes controversial amongst players) device in RPGs, they alter previously-standard dialogue practices by allowing the player to choose a tone rather than direct dialogue. For example, in one scene Shepard is confronted by a fan in a public space who asks if he can run an idea past her. The player can choose a positive "Conrad, I'm pretty busy," neutral "go ahead", or negative "Again? No." response. If the player chooses "go ahead," what Shepard actually says is "What's on your mind?". When Conrad asks if he can join Shepard's special forces group, the positive response marked on the dialog wheel is "I'm afraid not." The dialogue Shepard replies with is "Conrad, I don't think that's a good idea." In other words, the player can choose a rhetorical move, but the agency of the player is deferred to the game designers, moving the game play somewhat closer to that of the hypertext fiction reader; the user can choose a direction, but they cannot know (without some extra-game effort), what will happen when they do. In *Mass Effect* there are literally millions of lines of possible dialogue; even if a player chooses positive options on each play through, NPC characters may still react differently on the third playthrough than they do in the first.[50]

[50] *Mass Effect 3* has 40,000 lines of dialogue that can be combined in a variety of ways (Purslow, np.)

In other words, players draw upon a large database of material and put the pieces together to create the kind of story building experience they'd like to have. The very nature of replaying these kinds of games means that each time a user plays the game again, their experience is likely to be very similar in some respects (the role of their character as a primary rather than secondary character, the world-building of the story, and their companions) and very different in others. The goal of this kind of game is not winning, as it might be in a FPS or in older games like *Donkey Kong*, but the *ways in which* the game can take you from point A to point B. And these retellings and reinterpretations - iterations, if you will, take place in text-based environments. This is a kind of remix writing, and a remixed narrative composing experience for the user.

In focusing so tightly on the reading and writing (/narrative) aspects of games, some readers might think I am moving backwards in both game and literacy studies. After all, gaming literacy is its own field of study involving not only "serious" or "persuasive" games, but is, as Eric Zimmerman points out, literacy focused on systems, play, and design (24). We need only look to the emergence of academic game studies journals like *Game Studies* (2001), *Games and Culture* (2006), and *The Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* (2009) over the last several years point to the growing acceptance of video games as a field of study. However, fanfiction and remixed texts also rely on systems, play, and design, albeit in different formats. Although Aarseth argues that these similarities make big role playing games un-replayable, citing them as a key difference between games and narrative, in some ways they are almost eternally replayable.

This replayability separates their narrative structures from hypertext fiction; it is instead much closer to the practices we see in fanfiction. The multiplicity of perspectives available in short increments is one of the reasons these games are so effective in teaching rhetoric, as many scholars have capably shown. But these re-immersions in characters and worlds, the ways in which users can come back to particular points in the narratives before choosing a different direction, is one of the reasons why these kinds of games are so popular in this moment. One can repeat the same choices over and over again for an experience similar to re-reading a novel, or one can choose the opposite choices (Renegade vs Paragon options, in *ME*). Or one can choose to play as a Spacer instead of an Earthborn, as an Elf Mage in *Skyrim* instead of a human who specializes in smithing. While this isn't exactly the kind of replayability Aarseth argues is key to narrative, it *is* a re-immersion into a world and set of characters, and in each case the player writes, reads, and experiences their own story. Will the human join up with the Imperial Army to secure its future early in the game? Or will it avoid their racist jargon and perform the missions as an independent operator until the last possible moment in the game?

In drawing on a database of options and creating different points and methods of navigation between them, single player RPGs operate as remix texts that incorporate our more familiar remixed music and video methods, but also include written text. And as the sales figures and formats for games like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* demonstrate, the line between the different kinds of literacy practice is becoming increasingly blurred. Because remix is one of the primary composing methods of the late 20th and early 21st century, it makes sense that this kind of writing and reading experience would become

popular. Like fanfiction, these kinds of games reflect the cultural trend toward a desire for *more of* rather than a fixed or final ending. I've gone into some detail in how these narrative-based games are played and have been theorized because they can give us some insight into how and why fanfiction is created. Like games, in fic readers and writers build narratives from multiple perspectives in persistent environments through strongly trope-driven guidelines while drawing upon fragments of pre-created texts and characters, a kind of literacy practice only possible through an equally strong set of reader expectations for their experience.

7. Navigating the Maze

Just as with each other newly evolved form of narrative, scholars have attempted to determine what factors of a particular digital text made it a "story." Is it the sequence of events? The amount of authority granted to the reader? Is it still a story when multiple divergent events occurred or could occur simultaneously? When more than one person was involved in enacting the story, as in MMOs or even RPGs or FPS that include more than a few NPCs, who was the author? What, exactly, is the difference between a story and a game in a digital environment? Nick Monfort, in analyzing player/author control in IF suggests that we say a person in an IF game is "steering" a character, that "the player character is a sort of vehicle from which a world can be seen and otherwise experienced" (140). Greg Costikyan asserts that a story is linear, and a game is not. One of the key sticking points in the is-it-a-game-or-isn't-it debates was the degree to which any environment was interactive or participatory, terms which themselves were hotly contested between 1993 and 2003. Yellowlees Douglas, looking (mostly) back, offers an

engaging description of these debates, and neatly summarizes at least a few of the definitions about different kinds of digital narratives:

> …we will rely on the understanding shared by Bolter and Murray and consider *interactive* texts to be those that contain episodes in the form of chunked text and a range of action accompanying a single decision…we will call text-based narratives like "Twelve Blue" and Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* hypertext fiction, and, following Janet Murray's lead, refer to image-based texts like *The Last Express* and Shannon Gilligan's Multimedia Murder series as "digital narratives." (6, original emphasis)

But she quickly points to the blurred lines between game and narrative when she asks just pages later:

> What holds a narrative together, once you subtract successive paragraphs and sequential pages or its linear scene sequences? What sorts of stories lend themselves to a medium in which readers can return to the same narrative-as they can with the likes of *Myst*-for more than forty-five hours without exhausting the full range of possible developments and outcomes? (8)

Douglas, a digital scholar from at least the mid-1980s, is well aware that *Myst*, of course, is the first-person story-based game released in 1993 and a perennial best-seller for the next decade.

At the center of most theories on narrative in gameplay are questions of authority, repetition or replayability, and readers/players/users responses to multiplicity instead of closed endings in narrative structures. These are the same questions that surround other forms of remix, and the exploration of answers to these questions in the text-based forms

of video games can help provide some answers as to how we can answer them for fanfiction.

For the purposes of this dissertation at least, I would like to take it as read that story-based games are becoming increasingly popular, and that as they involve players reading words printed upon screens, at least some games involve strong narrative components. *Second Person* editors Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin pragmatically suggest that the idea and definitions of games have been too strictly enforced. They say they are "not interested in questions such as 'What is a game?'" or "questions of center and periphery. Rather, we are interested in questions such as 'How is this played?'" (xiii). To this end they coined the term "playable media," a term that encompasses "games, as well as other forms that 'invite and structure play'" (xiii).[51] This approach echoes Ryan's suggestion that Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance" - the idea that a term may not represent all items in a category, but instead the sufficient properties to link them together - is a useful way to think about game studies. Family resemblance, she says, should be used "as a challenge to identify the features on which the resemblance is based" (*Storyworlds* 27). What I want to suggest is that, like the RPGs I described above, fanfiction also relies on systems of play, design, pattern, and remix, albeit in a slightly different format.

Some of these systems emerge from a linguistic level in fanfiction. Fanfiction is (currently) most frequently the transformation of a visual and aural media/ums into a text-based system. On a fundamental level, then, fanfiction is already playing with and

[51] "Playable media" has received widespread acceptance within the game studies community. In 2010 UC-Santa Cruz opened their Center for Games and Playable Media. http://games.soe.ucsc.edu/node/1374

twisting meaning into various positions and languages from the moment the first word of the story is typed or read. This kind of iterative work relies on the slipperiness of all language, and more than that *draws attention to* its own construction, the way that it is simultaneously calling into being the idea of a thing (a character, a setting), and asking you to pull away from that idea at the same time. You are stuck in a moment of transition for the entirety of a fic. It is perhaps this push/pull that leads to the very high number of funny fics (there is an entire sub-genre called crack!fic, which pushes both humor and language to extremes). For example, "Moving On," a story by astolat, has the following disclaimer (which I present only in part):

> ….it shamelessly raids the Justice League cartoon and some of the more cracktastic bits of DC canon for inspiration and just keeps going from there. If you need to know who Maxima is, Wikipedia is your pal! (Also, if you read to the end of the entry there is a picture of her trading card, which features Superman in chains and collar and shredded costume kneeling at her feet. You know, if you like that sort of thing.) The story covers the central characters emerging from the DC Comic franchises and their spinoffs (Superman and Smallville, etc.). (astolat, np)

The more parodic the fic is, the longer and funnier the disclaimers tend to be, acknowledging and extending the creator's role in the traditional sense by explaining what they are *not*. astolat's disclaimer here points to the multiple gaps of opportunity available in the source text, and as many other iterations of the text as can be included. They deliberately push the reader to other sources while at the same time letting us know

through name dropping (citationality) and tone which sources are going to be used and the degree to which they are going to adhere to the canon texts. "Cracktastic" is a warning and an invitation to play.[52]

The disclaimer above also provides us with a lexia, or user's guide, to the fic. The internet, Janet Murray says, is full of "navigational pleasures" that "allow us to experience pleasures specific to intentional navigation: orienting ourselves by landmarks, mapping a space mentally to match our experience, and admiring the juxtapositions and changes in perspective the derive from moving through an intricate environment" (129). Many digital games are built on a navigational model; the internet is simultaneously space and text, and games exploit the ongoing tension between them, sending us through dungeons and into neighboring war zones.

In fanfiction, the landmarks readers follow are the pieces of canon, fanon, and tropes they already know. In the disclaimer above, we know we are going to be encountering The Justice League and other bits of the DC franchises along the way, and astolat has provided a link to an outside source for the less-popular character they'll be using. This is helpful, as the main character pairing, Clark/Lex (from *Smallville*) don't begin to appear until 400 words into the story. The character descriptions support the reader as they go through the story; Superman and Lex Luthor, the popular main characters, don't have any

[52] It is worth noting that the use of disclaimers is fading, and this reflects generational differences. Creators who were working in the 1970s to about 2005 are/were very likely to use them, as they lived in a time where writers could be sued and fics could be taken down without warning. Disclaimers were a standard practice up through the 2005-08 move away from Livejournal as a sharing platform, and the coinciding development of The Archive of Our Own. They are still more likely to be present on fanfiction.net, which has had its own share of legal issues, than they are on new fics on Livejournal or the Ao3. In this case, however, astolat's disclaimer is itself standing in for the whole of fanfiction linguistic practices.

physical descriptions in the first part of the fic. But when Maxima arrives she is viewed through the perspective of Lex Luthor, allowing the reader to imagine the "six feet tall, red hair rioting over her shoulders, with the inhuman beauty of a supermodel after image manipulation except for the thin clinging film of grey dust on her skin and a trickle of blood down her arm" woman (np). However we are provided with a view of Luthor's internal landscape; right before Maxima comes in he has poured himself a glass of scotch and is "trying not to look too hard at his feelings" (np). This is the grumpy, emotionally repressed, scotch-drinking character typical of Luthor, and so the creator only needs to provide a description of where he's physically located in time and space, and the degree to which he's embracing the deliberate ignorance of his feelings for Superman.

These markers help locate readers within the narrative in the same way heading toward enemies in video games lets you know you are heading the right direction. As I said in chapter one, in hypertext fiction the navigational codes for working through the databases are not gone, they are simply hidden from the reader. In both video games - especially the kind of story-based systems like *Mass Effect, Skyrim*, and *Dragon Age* - and fanfiction, the codes are readily visible. This action of finding one's way through the connections, which draws on many older narrative traditions, nevertheless also reflects the method of reading required by the internet; following the link to a new destination. The glee in navigating through this kind of textual landscape-alternating between referents is one of the distinct joys of digital spaces. The intensive patterning in fanfiction creates a navigable maze. With its ongoing leaping between referents, fanfiction provides these same kinds of pleasures, the mixture of invitation and end goal creates an irresistible reading experience.

Ryan thinks of this navigation between references in terms of immersion. In hypertext fiction, she says, "the threat of uprooting occurs with the every change of screen," while in novels like *If on a winter's night a traveler*, the lexia is fragile but more apparent than hypertext. In that novel, the reader is first confronted with a chapter of metadiscourse on reading, and then each odd-numbered section is the first chapter of a different story, while each even-numbered section is a second-person narrative seemingly about the reader of the text. As she says, Calvino troubles the reader's immersive process by starting other stories throughout his novel which are "brutally interrupted…just as the reader is beginning to view himself as a citizen of the fictional world" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 262). Hypertext fiction amplifies this dislocating effect, because "the threat of uprooting occurs with the every change of screen" (262). Hypertext fiction removes the pleasure of navigation, because readers cannot orient themselves toward the next point of progress in the narrative. Hypertext readers wander rather than pursue. Fanfiction readers and writers navigate toward the goals provided by the referents, certain of their safety.

In the games I described in the previous section, the player is given multiple options of characterization; although the characters are internally consistent, they can still be complicated, or have more of one characteristic than another. This variety of emphasis in character is similar, if less complex than, the character development we see in fanfiction. Like video games, fic writers and readers choose from an extensive set of predetermined options and answers when creating stories. Draco is smart-mouthed and nasty in one fic because he is emotionally fragile due to abuse and neglect at home, and smart-mouthed and nasty in another fic because he has lived a life of extreme privilege, but when

portrayed as a child in fanfiction he is consistently mouthy and nasty because that is how he is portrayed in the *Harry Potter* canon. Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca, in describing "transmedial" worlds, describe this kind of consistency in terms of mythos, topos, and logos; the backstory and narrative of the world, the world's location in space and time, and the "explicit and implicit ethics, or the moral codex of behavior for characters" (297). When these are strong enough, as they are in franchises like *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*, the narratives can carry over into other transmedial worlds such as video games or fanfiction. The difference between fic and RPGS, of course, is that writers must develop and maintain characterizations throughout their stories.

For example, if one is reading or writing a Kirk/Spock story, at some point Spock will raise a questioning eyebrow at Kirk. Both readers and writers of the fic are likely familiar with the multitude of variations of Spock's eyebrows from the television series, original film series, and film series reboot. Fic writers must think carefully about what parts of the canon need to be carefully described. Parts of the canon that are remaining more or less the same, such as Spock's eyebrow, do not need to be described in much detail; readers are expected to already know what it looks like. But if Kirk and Spock are working in a coffee shop rather than on a spaceship, their uniform modifications will reflect both the world in which the story operates and the role of the character within the fic. Because significant portions of the story are not described in fanfiction, readers must be able to hold in their minds all of the different known version of a character's actions. It is this rather complicated reading activity that separates fic most distinctly from original plain text and hypertext fiction.

For example, in “User Since,” characters of the Marvel Avengers franchise are re-imagined in ways that reflect the canon texts and fannish practice. In this fic, the straight-laced Agent Phil Coulson, who is canonically also a huge Captain America fanboy, has been a well-loved member of a Captain America fan site. When he goes missing after an alien attack on New York as demonstrated in the movie, members of the community search for him, and eventually share their grief with the Avengers team. Throughout the text, the author draws both on canon and fannish conventions. The story opens immediately after the attack with a call for New York members of the board to check in; because fan communities are frequently multinational, this kind of call is common after natural disasters and military invasions. Later, when Captain America writes a letter to Phil Coulson upon the occasion of Phil’s death, the language is representative of Captain America/Steve Rogers’ logos:

> I've signed your cards, although there's quite a bit more damage than foxing to the corners. Bruce says his experience being a relative shut in turned him into an internet shopping genius, and he promises to use as much of Tony's money as needed to find you a perfect set. I'll sign those, too. (np.)

The collectors cards, the foxing on the corners, and Bruce’s (The Hulk) experience as a shut in are canon. Steve’s desire to sign the cards - items he was embarrassed to even recognize in the Avengers film- are an indication of his acceptance of his new role in society and his relationship to Phil Coulson, which necessarily includes acknowledging Phil’s fanboy behaviors. This part of the fic takes place immediately after the events of

the 21012 *Avengers* and is created by the author. As the story moves forward, readers of the fic navigate from one point of reference to another; fandom:fandom to fandom:Avengers and back again.

8. Playable Media

Thinking about the navigation process required by the internet and utilized in video games through their use of tropes and textual databases puts fanfiction in a different light than the imitative writing it is frequently considered to be. The implied/conceptual links that provide the lexia, provide the navigational points for readers to negotiate through the stories, are text-based representations of Banks's scratch. Through their very existence - by requiring readers to hold alternate versions of characterizations and events in mind even as they read the story in front of them, they pull readers into other possibilities of interpretation. These links are a form of static, inviting readers to develop other networks and bridges between texts. By reading and writing fanfiction, and becoming part of fannish communities, users view contemporary media not as texts to be thoughtlessly consumed, but as playable media. As Dreamwidth user reading-is-in puts it:

> ….But more importantly, it made me realized that I *don't* make an investment of trust-in-realism when I sit down to receive a story. I don't enter a teller-listener contract. I'm more thinking, 'tell me something interesting to play and mess around with' than 'tell me something good'. Any thoughts? (np)

That is, for fandom the canon exists as something to be built with, raw materials. It is a genre based on play and invention, and on the fact of the thing itself, that the *play is the thing*. Fandom isn't here for one story, or one kind of story. Fandom is here for the act of the scratch, the creation of significant noise.

For example, "Stand and Deliver" is a fic described by the creator as "an abandoned X-Men:First Class Regency genderfuck AU WIP.[53]" The play of the text - the scratch - is apparent from the very beginning of the titles. *Stand and Deliver* is perhaps best-known these days as the 1988 film that documents the work of a high school teacher pushing his Mexican-American students to work toward the AP Calculus exam. The National Film Registry recognized the film as one that "celebrates in a direct, approachable, and impactful way, values of self-betterment through hard work and power through knowledge." The origin of the phrase, however, comes from its common use by eighteenth century highwaymen. While it is possible that the author was drawing on both uses of the phrase (as the X-Men run a school for mutants), they may be referencing both or neither of them. *X-Men:First Class* is the fifth film in the series based upon the X-Men characters created in the Marvel comic book universe, and it documents the building frenemy relationship between Charles Xavier (Professor X) and Erik Lensherr (Magneto) during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. In this story, the creator has moved Charles and Erik into an English Regency setting complete with carriages, corsets, and arranged marriages. Charles is here Charlotte; dear friends since childhood, the tragedies of war

[53] See the glossary for definitions of these terms.

have separated Charlotte and Erik, and in the opening scene of the story Erik performs a daring rescue of his lady so that they may be together again.

The fic is operating in multiple fandoms on multiple levels. In addition to the X-men fandom (with all of its multiple iterations), it also replicates the tropes of a Harlequin-style Regency-era romance novel. Our male hero is a rogue who "looks tired and older, skin sun browned from the battlefields, and there is a scar on his cheek, pink and new, but he's exactly the same: handsome and solemn, with a hidden streak of wickedness, ferociously certain — dangerous, but not to her," (np) the man who would move heaven and earth to rescue his beloved. When he pulls her across the saddle so that they may escape in a daring gallop, Charlotte "fists a hand in his coat, gasping, and trying to breathe through it, feeling every fiber of the linen wrappings pressing into her spine beneath the corset Kurt had forced her into anyway, apparently unconcerned her health or humiliation as he'd sat her room, watching the wet-eyed French lady's maids lacing Charlotte into it" (np). Kurt Wagner aka Nightcrawler from the Marvel franchise has here been cast as the villain whom Charlotte had (for unexplained reasons) been nearly forced to marry. The character types, Europe at war, the detailed descriptions of the lady's dresses throughout and the various power and class plays apparent in the fic are all standard to the Regency romance novel.

The fic also draws on standard tropes of many sub-genres of fanfiction: the heroine is the star of the fic, with the entire story being told from her perspective, and the traditional financial roles of romance novels are reversed; rather than the hero being a Rake, the lady is bound to inherit a fortune and the gentleman is (at the beginning of the story at least) a poor barrister's son. Our lady is a strong and powerful character pursuing her gentleman

from the tender age of six, and is demonstrably sassy. Her characterization, then, performs the sort of standard reversal of women's roles that early fannish scholarship might focus on. But looking beyond that we can see that the underlying humor and play in the fic comes from the very idea of the super-mutants operating in a non-magical/non-science-fiction setting. That is, what characteristics does the Erik of the movie and the multiple comics in the franchise retain here? How does being female - and especially a female in a particularly restrictive society - change Charles?

Each of these multiple references can be identified as a kind of textual scratch; the presentation of the story itself is somewhat analogous to that of a remixed song. A good song, even one that borrows heavily or samples from another, is enjoyable even by listeners who don't recognize every reference. You don't need to know each of the hundreds of samples in "3 is the Magic Number" to enjoy it, and the same can be said of good fic. However, your enjoyment is increased through the background knowledge you have, the more you can notice the interplay of references. Another way of looking at this kind of work would be to envision a song laid out in a program like Garage Band or Audacity. When you're mixing sound together, you can have one line for the bass, one for guitar, one for vocals, one for keyboards and so on; you push each level up and down to adjust the final sound of the composition.

When we read fanfiction, the amount of background and canon knowledge that each reader brings to a text adjusts the levels of signal in the story. For example, if one is very familiar with the X-men franchise, but not familiar with the English Regency, the X-men referents will have more resonance for that reader. Likewise if one is very familiar with Regency style romances and not at all with X-men, the story is still quite readable; the

characters have been transformed enough to fill the tropes of that genre. If one is familiar with neither X-men or Regency romances, but is familiar with fanfiction as a genre, the story has yet another kind of resonance. Because this is a never-to-be finished Work In Progress, each of these readers may be left with different questions about the text. The X-men fan might wonder if there will be a display of mutant powers at any point; the Regency fan might wonder if the couple will make their marriage destination, or if Kurt will turn out to be more powerful than the characters imagined; the fandom reader might wonder - as the story is labeled a genderfuck rather than a genderswap - if Charlotte was perhaps born Charles, and is presenting as female for any multitude of reasons.

As I described in Chapter One, this movement between genres, and expansion of references within the fic itself reflects the expansive linking function of the internet. Each fic reaches toward and returns from a multitude of external references. This action is similar to the work done in heavily remixed music. “Schoolhouse Rock” does a different kind of work in “3 is the Magic Number” than it does when it aired directly after Bugs Bunny on Saturday mornings, but the call out is important. So to do our new X-Men friends Charlotte & Erik, and the call out is just as important. In *Digital Griots*, Banks provides a short list of the qualities and practices of a DJ that are present in our current methods of writing instruction. For each of the points he provides, fanfiction provides an equivalent or an expanding idea (26):

The shootout as a the use of references, calling the roll, and identifying and declaring one's relationships, allegiances, and influences as tools for building community and locating oneself within it	In fanfiction we see this in each reading of the canon and, at a minimum, in the author's notes, the thanks they give to their cheerleaders, beta readers, community mods, or the person that inspired them to write it.
Crate-digging as continual research-not merely for the songs, hooks, breakbeats, riffs, texts, arguments, and quotes for a particular set or paper but as a crucial part of one's long-term work, of learning, knowing, and interpreting a tradition.	In fanfiction the reading and understanding of fandom's cultural history and traditions is crucial. All writers read fic and build upon the traditions of their communities. For example, the alpha/beta/omega universe was developed in 2006. In 2012-3 we began to see relatively common genderswapped versions of this trope. There are widespread community practices for language style within fic, the appropriate way to leave feedback, and how one asks to transform another's work.

Figure 6: Table aligning fanfiction with Adam Banks' reading of remix and dj-ing.

Mixing as the art of the transition and as revision in the Adrienne Rich sense of writing as a re-vision.	It is difficult to see how fanfiction is anything but what Rich described as "[r]e-vision- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." (18)
Remix as critical interpretation of a text, repurposing it for a different rhetorical situation as 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication chair Gwen Pough challenges the field to "remix:revisit, rethink, revise, renew" in the conference call.	Beyond fic itself, what happens when fic is based on fan art, or a fan mix? What happens when a fic is podficced? This leaves aside the regular challenges, and of course RemixRedux, an annual challenge in which one fic is remixed into another (going into its 11th year in 2014)
Mixtape as anthology, as everyday act of canon formation, interpretation, and reinterpretation.	Fandom and fanfiction are a regular part of daily life for many users. Their literacy practices are formed around the idea that one thing can and should be made into another.
Sample as those quotes, those texts, those ideas used enough, important enough to our conceptions of what we are doing in a text (or even in our lifelong work) to be looped and continually repeated rather than merely quoted or repeated.	Fanfiction cites, requests, loops, repeats, and transforms.

Figure 6, cont.

9. Now press repeat

The database negotiation I described in Chapter One means that each fic is a puzzle for the users to figure out; they have to find the right lexia.[54] This idea may at first seem contradictory to the genre's use of tropes and patterns, but in each story and reference the users can (and quite nearly must, unless they are reading so completely outside their fandom the story may as well be original fiction) compare the descriptors and actions of the characters within the fic to the characters as they know them in other iterations, both in canon and in other fic. The pleasure of navigating from one reference point to another in fanfiction is a dramatically different literacy practice than reading what is traditionally called original fiction, and it is one of the primary reasons fanfiction is so popular.

Fanfiction is closer in nature to remixed music than it is to video game playing, but we can take useful practices and theories from each of these fields to further our understanding of the genre and the role it might play in digital theory. Like video games, fanfiction is written in fragments, drawing heavily on well-known tropes to guide the user through the experience. Like remixed music, however, fanfiction users pull fragments not from limited options of pre-written text, but from shared databases of knowledge. Fanfiction is frequently viewed as derivative because its interactivity is largely invisible; indeed, the linking process takes place exclusively in the minds of its users. But in his examination of writing practices in Web 2.0 environments such as Twitter, Wordpress, and Diigo, Bill Wolff says that we "need to pay more attention to, first, the interactivity that is embedded in and afforded by Web 2.0 applications and, second the processes that

[54] I'm following Doug Eyman and George Landow's use of lexia, which is based on Barthes "units of reading." http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/1.2/features/eyman/lexia.html

are invisible to the composer," activities that are considered commonplace in comics and electronic literature (212). He goes on to suggest that we need to take these activities into account in composition studies, due to the evolving environments Web 2.0 provides.

In this chapter I suggest that we can take this even further into literacy studies. While Wolff points out that we need to account for the enormous amount of knowledge that goes into activities like tagging blog posts and embedding media into other writing spaces (like photos into twitter), what if we assume that readers will take those knowledges into their reading of texts that do not *visibly* require them? As Wolff says,

> Web 2.0 constantly challenges users' abilities to engage with and conceive of the invisible. When users post something to Twitter or Facebook from within a third-party page or create a Diigo bookmark from an embedded toolbar, they must have a conception of what is going to happen with their data after they click Send. In other words, users must be thinking about what is not seen while interacting with what is in front of them. (222)

This is in fact the primary expectation of readers of digital texts; they expect media/texts to be connected to other texts and they expect the nature of that linking mechanism to change over time; Moore's law remains in effect. Given the digital environments inherent linking mechanisms and the nature of Moore's law, how can we be surprised that texts that wish to remain stable embrace both of these components? Fanfiction readers and writers are deeply imbued in digital environments, and through their ongoing literacy involvements and expansions have been trained to understand medias in relationship to each other, and in the ways that they might intersect and be linked together. Fanfiction invisibly links to sources outside of itself. The links are implied, gestured toward, in the

mechanics of the genre, and followed by the readers and writers of the texts. Removing the mechanical link is its own form of digital literacy; directly linking to outside sources means the text could become unreadable in just a short time. Its absence, paradoxically, ensures more textual stability.

Noted game expert Ken Perlin asserts that a story is successful because it "asks us to set aside our right to make choices- our agency" (14). We view the story through our protagonist's perspective. So far, easy enough, although certainly authors like Borges and Calvino rely on frustrating this same experience. In contrast, Perlin continues, "A game does not force us to relinquish our agency. In fact the game depends upon it" (14). When he reads *Harry Potter*, he is swept away in the story; he cares about the characters. When he plays *Lara Croft*, he doesn't care about her after the story is done. Victoria Vesna responds to Perlin that what they enjoy about game design is the "idea that I can create a character with a few simple brush strokes (personality, quirks, hidden flaws) and then unleash that character into a world and watch what naturally emerges from those traits" (14). It is this latter action that occurs in fanfiction. Writers take characters and put them in new situations. Fic users, in these terms, are acting both like readers of fiction and players of video games. They allow themselves to be taken away by the story, and by reading multiple versions of these worlds and characters, they are inhabiting those worlds in much the same way experienced by players of video games who replay games with new experiences each time.

The excessive multiplicity of meaning in digital storytelling has another purpose. Using Klastrup and Tosca's transmedial world theory, as I described earlier, we can see how putting Arthur and Eames from *Inception*, for example, into a coffee shop au

demonstrates just this kind of genre mixing; that kind of story retains the ethos of the film's characters, disregards the topos, and dramatically shifts the mythos of the story world. The made up example above would likely contain romantic comedy tropes, Arthur's crisp perfectionism, and Eames studied insouciance as shown in the film, distinctly adjusted to reflect their new employment circumstances. It would also include the material transformations of visual medium into narrative, drawing again on aspects of the film version, and representations of coffee shops as they are known around the world. The coffee shop au is a common trope; each one is likely to contain several genres of narrative and literacy. Using genre theory's model of uptake- the study of how genres interact, Brian Ray suggests that instead of focusing on remix texts as discrete objects or ends in themselves that we would be better served by considering the relationships between multiple medias and genres. This perspective allows us to view multimedia projects not as products but as midpoints in a process (183). Remixed work, he suggests, operates as a convergence point for these conversations. It is just this kind of genre mixing that fanfiction does so well.

There is room for both alphabetic and more multimodal work in composition, and using remixed and transformed text-based works can help shorten the distance that students sometimes put between them. While fanfiction is often considered an aberration of digital writing, in this chapter, I have described how fanfiction operates like two of the other primary types of digital writing that are widely studied, and how we can effectively draw on hypertext, game studies, and remix to study and teach fanfiction. Fanfiction incorporates the emphasis on linking from hypertext studies, the strong genre rules and widely evident maps from video game studies, and the pulling from pre-established

pieces of material apparent in remix culture. These aspects of fic allow users to enjoy the ongoing process of critical thinking and invention that occurs in each fic. In the next chapter, I'll describe how fanfiction can be used to pursue these goals in the classroom.

Chapter Three: 5 Things

Rating: Teen

Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply

Fandom: Fandom, Giambattista Vico (implied)

Relationship: Gen, everyone/everyone

Characters: the usual mishmash, feminist scholars are the best ones,

Additional Tags: could be gsf, depending on how you look at it, I mean we're all drawn together through language right?, not quite ready for the Trash Party, if you get to Burke/Tyler Seguin that's your own fault, look if you don't believe code is a narrative maybe back click now, absence is the new presence

Language: English

Series: Part Three of The One Where series

Stats: Published: 03/27/15 Words:

Summary: Fanfiction is a particularly useful text to use in rhetoric and comp classes because it *is* an interface, a text-based representation of rhetorical intent. As Pete Selber says, a student who is rhetorically literate will understand the persuasive, deliberative, reflective, and social action aspects of digital texts. That is, digital literacy requires the understanding of interface design as a "social rather than technical action," and the ways

in which interfaces create persuasion through its use of "larger structures and forces (e.g. use contexts, ideology)" (*Multiliteracies*, 147). [55]

Notes: 5 Things/5 Times (+ 1): A writing form or structure that requires a set of multiple scenes that are related to each other in some way without being in the same chronological timeline." Popularity of the trope led to "multiple interpretations, the most common of which is five separate sections that all share a similar theme, such as snapshots of alternative universes, or other moments that never happened in canon, but may be five moments in an over-arching narrative (fanlore, np)

"The stories transmitted by media do not have to concern the real world to produce real behaviors." - Ryan and Thon, *Storyworlds Across Media* (2)

1. Introduction

In the introduction to 2014's *On Multimodality: New Media in Composition Studies*, Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes ask what we are gaining -- and what we are losing -- in asking students to be technically adept across multiple mediums in their composing practices. Describing a remix assignment in which a student created a short animated film in response to a Haruki Marakami story, they say "to what extent is the video, however well done, simply an illustration of a text, as opposed to a thinking-through of the rhetorical capabilities of the video medium? Moreover, if the relationship

[55] Also, fanfiction rocks.

between original source material and the video illustration is unclear, how are we to understand - and how is the student to articulate *through the medium of video* - his relationship to different media?" (15, original emphasis). Their question hinges on whether a work that engages with another is replicating the original text or transforming it, creating a commentary on the original. This question grounds U.S. Fair Use laws, but also gets to the heart of what we do in rhetoric classes: how are students questioning the material we give them? How are they challenging it? How are they demonstrating that they thoughtfully consider the possible positions available in every text? Their question additionally points to issues of genre; *On Multimodality* thoughtfully engages questions of literacy, multimodal composition, and the role of alphabetic writing in our classrooms.

In this chapter, I will describe some of the ways fanfiction can help incorporate these ideals into practice in the classroom, and, therefore and inevitably, into our professionalization practices. When it comes to composition, many teachers still are stuck at two extremes of delivery. They can have their students create web texts with images and sound and color, or they can ask their students to create more traditional texts based on the white page 12 point font format. Both of these forms have distinct advantages. While web texts can add layers of meaning, students frequently consider the more traditional forms to be more "serious" or "real." Fanfiction usefully provides a middle ground between these two kinds of objects. Because it can be created in a flat text environment, it provides both the more serious impact, and reduces the number of computer resources students may need to utilize, reducing the economic ramifications of digital literacies. And because it creates serious rhetorical inquiry into popular culture utilizing digital composition methods, it enables instructors to easily discuss these

methods in a way that is more familiar to their students (who may be used to a five paragraph essay) and to themselves.

I would like to offer one way to reconcile what can sometimes seem like an increasingly wide division between text-based and more consciously multimodal work by examining what alphabetic writing looks like in digital spaces. Although rhetoric and composition continue to emphasize the importance of new media texts, we are still struggling, as a field, to apply the values of new media writing practices across mediums. Although always overlapping, these values might be roughly summarized as: an emphasis on materiality, particularly through an attention to medium, delivery and style; intense networking of ideas, including collaborative work among peers; ongoing generation of processes and products rather than the expectation of a singular or unique product; and broad expectations of "failure" in pursuit of emerging ideas (/failure as success).

2. Materiality

A. Medium

In Chapter One I used Anne Wysocki's definition of new media, which, like remix, can have several varying meanings. Wysocki argues that new media texts are or can be "any text that has been designed so that its materiality is not effaced" (15). These texts that forefront their materiality do something different to their audiences than media that do not. New media texts are made so that "[w]hoever produces the text and whoever consumes it understand-because the text asks them to, in one way or another- that the various materialities of a text contribute to how it, like its producers and consumers, is read and understood" (15). This attention to materiality allows us to consider texts as new

media if they make us "stay alert to *how* and *why* we make these combinations of materials, not simply *that* we do it" (19, original emphasis). In other words, by this definition new media texts are texts that occur in a conversation between creator and audience. Using this definition of new media texts as postmodern texts that are focused on their materiality means that we might once again return to the idea of a dialogue between creator and user common to early hypertext theory. But the difference between hypertext fiction and the kinds of remixed and transformed texts I described in the previous chapter is that in the latter the dialogue between users is *visible* and *repeatable*. These kinds of new media texts are openly in conversation with their predecessors and their future interpretations and uses.

Wysocki's theory is useful because it includes texts that we might not otherwise consider, even non-digital texts, and so can help us negotiate the spaces between remix and remediation theories while working with fanfiction, which might appear to act like a flat text document. This is a very different idea than both hypertext and the kind of subsuming remediated texts that Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin offer in *Remediation* as modern new media texts. Remediated texts, they argue, are the product of a culture that wants "to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation…to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them" (5). Remediated texts operate in constant dialogue with their predecessors, but the effect is to overwhelm the user with the immediate process they are experiencing. That is, in these cases, the media invokes and reproduces other images and connections because it cannot help but do so; no media exists without other media. Because the references are so intense, the user can begin to ignore the medium, and absorb the message conveyed through the medium without too

much thought. The remediated experience is nearly invisible, the user feels as though their medium is transparent. Fic, in contrast, is always drawing our attention to the thing it is *not*. Its hypermediation occurs through a gap.

Texts that emerge from ongoing conversations rely on extant context from both creator and audience while simultaneously adding new layers of context and conversation. New media texts invite a response, they want *users* instead of audiences. Joyce Locke and Michael Day recently said that digital humanities work, and digital rhetoric in particular, should teach by using texts that are "skeptical and curious, playful," that value "testing limits," and are grounded in the digital deployment of "constructivism, tinkering, fluidity."[56] But despite the ongoing discussion developing playful building in digital humanities, digital rhetoric, and digital composition, we've been reluctant to extend this praxis to alphabetic text. In part, this is because text, particularly plain text on a screen, is often fully remediated. It is often seen as the default and best method to convey information. Even when we type our long form compositions on the screen (as I am doing now), there is a tendency to view the screen as a natural extension of paper. (This tendency remains true right up until we begin to experience eye strain from staring at a bright screen for too long, or when someone on Facebook links to another article about how technology is separating us from each other.) Bolter and Grusin tell us this means alphabetic text on a screen is fully remediated. This feeling of the screen as natural is one of the obstacles to considering fanfiction as a part of ongoing digital practices. In remixed and transformative texts, however, the medium is forefronted. It is this obvious

materiality and invitation to build on the conversation that links remix, video game play, and fanfiction literacies.

B. Delivery and Style

Digital scholarship has often considered delivery through style, and especially through strongly visual means: scholarship from the early 1980s onward has discussed the ways in which electronic word processing, and later, computers were changing delivery.[57] In the post-hypertext theory era, these typically focus on composition and assessment in and with multimodal (sound, video, and image-based) writing environments. In part, this emphasis is because, as is widely known, when rhetoric shifted its focus from oral to written discourse, memory seemed less necessary. In this section, I would like to suggest that traditional theories of delivery, including memory, can also help us negotiate alphabetic texts in digital environments.

In 2009's "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery." Jim Ridolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss[58] look at the strategies web text creators use to ensure the "right" block of their alphabetic texts are picked up to be used by other creators later on. They "find this type of thinking—the asking of "how might the text be rewritten?" and "why, where, and for whom might this text be rewritten?"—an increasingly important set of questions in a digital age characterized, for instance, by swift, easy, and deep web searching and by copying and pasting practices." (Np)

[57] See: Adsanatham, Garrett, and Matzke, 2013; Porter, 2009; DeVoss & Porter, 2006; Yancey, 2006; Banks, 2005, Rhodes, 2004, Yancey, 2004, Welch, 2009; Selfe, 1999, Hawisher & Sullivan 1999).

Ridolfo and DeVoss demonstrate the effects of careful strategizing that allow for certain types of information to be picked up by search engines and public news sources. Their examples of political website communications show "how it is possible to learn how a process of rhetorical delivery occurs (and how delivery is knowledge-producing)…further study could yield partial institutional patterns of rhetorical delivery, as well as forms and ranges for various types of appropriation, recomposition, and remixing by different composers," in short, they prove that in alphabetic text based delivery it is still possible to examine for rhetorical strategies and trends. While they posit that the building block effect of the press release is deliberate (and by now we know that it always is) we can also by now know that this method of writing for recomposition has become naturalized in many places. See, for example, Figure 7:

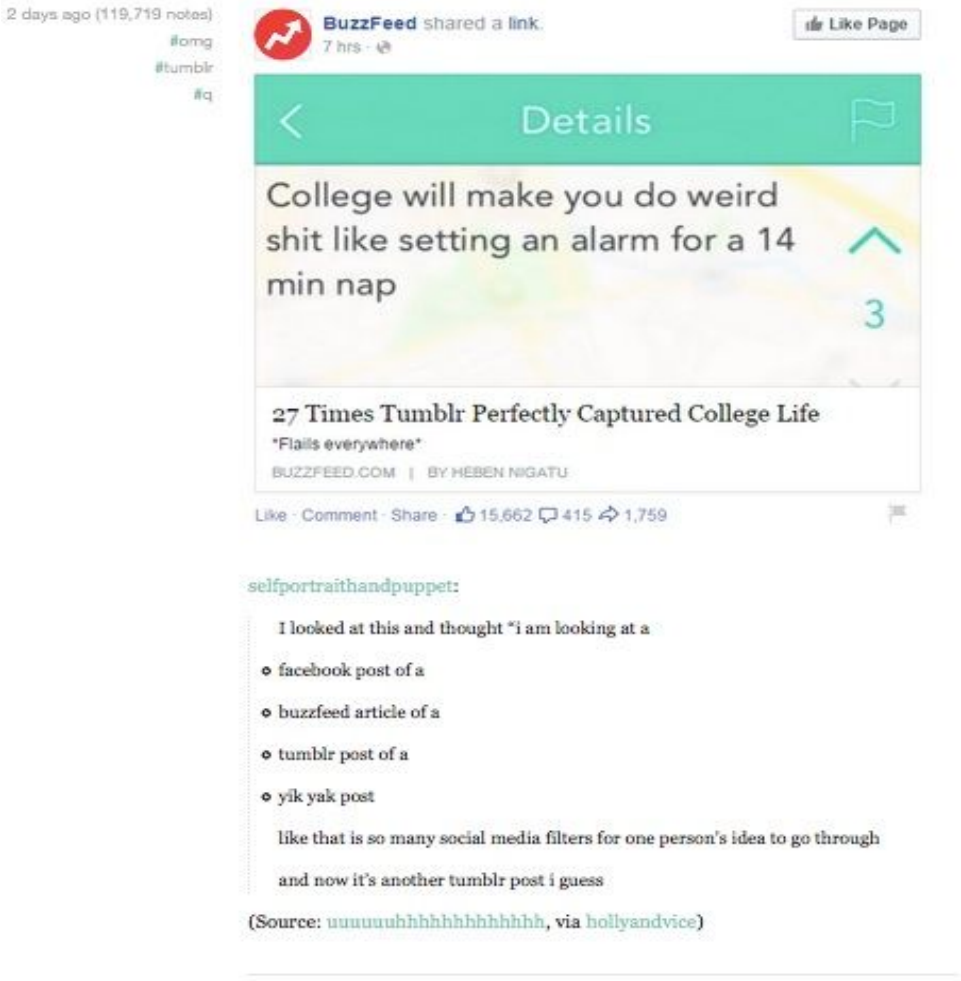

Figure 7: Screengrab from Tumblr titled "College will make you do weird shit," with the caption: "I looked at this and thought "i am looking at a

*facebook post of

*buzzfeed article of a

*tumblr post of a

*yik yak post

like that is so many social media filters for one person's idea to go through

and now it's another tumblr post i guess" (np, original formatting)

The image above demonstrates through a blending of alphabetic text and images the kind of strategic deployment Ridolfo and DeVoss theorized, and it shows that this kind of deployment emerges from a thorough understanding of a situated practice of delivery. The commenter's language meets the genre expectations of Tumblr in tone, and the description of the hypermediated work meets the genre expectations of the medium – Tumblr users are especially aware of their own movements through mediums, and metadiscourse is common on the site. This post, being filtered through five different social mediums, utilizes Alan Liu's pouring technique, and then the commenter halts the pouring and resituates our path to the image. This situated practice doesn't need to be a formal strategic performance; it is a common point of contemporary communication in digital environments. As James Porter notes, in this kind of work "[m]emory here is not only a mechanical question of information storage, but a *techne* question involving the process for generating information content and considering audience (*invent*), design of information (*disposito*), and mechanisms for technological delivery *(actio*) (211). By re-articulating the various image-based forms of the post into a flat text-based form, the creator shows how visual strategies of delivery are assumed to be widely understood - the humor of the post relies on the audience understanding the sort of fatigue that can occur in negotiating the various forms of visual delivery. This same kind of transference and translation is readily apparent in fanfiction.

3. Collaboration and Networks

Research on digital collaboration and the associated development of networks has investigated each new version of digital technology and how we might use it in the classroom. Much of the early research looked toward defining what collaboration meant for composition (see for example: Ede & Lunsford 1990, Yancey and Spooner 1998), and was interested in how digital spaces might build communities and collaboration by democratizing learning environments (see for example: Amy Goodburn and Beth Ina (1994), Bump 1990, Brufee 1984), which was complicated by work that showed online spaces easily reinforced and re-inscribed social conditions rather than being the emancipatory space that was hoped for (Takayoshi 1994, Welch 2003). As I described in chapter two, other work has asked how different collaborative digital learning environments like games, wikis, and blogs, might give us the opportunity for developing new pedagogies and practices. Although fanfiction is usually examined from an ethnographic perspective, the pedagogical practices of western media fandoms have recently been modeled and explained for mainstream academic audiences (Roozen 2009, Lackner, Lucas and Reid 2006, Lammers 2013) . Fanfiction texts and practices are a productive addition to examinations of networked learning because they offer unique opportunities for developing collaboration and networks that side-step many of the common objections students have toward collaborative work.

IVANHOE

But although fanfiction has only rarely been examined in rhetorical contexts, there are other text-based, and even fictional, web spaces that have been used for rhetorical work. The productive potential text-based collaborative space was rhetorically examined and deployed in the IVANHOE game. Developed at the University of Virginia in 2000 by

Jerome McGann and Johanna Drucker, IVANHOE is a digital mapping tool that generates connections between lines of thought as well as producing new texts around a reader's experience with a (usually fictional) text (209-230). IVANHOE was based on the idea that every text contains multiple potential versions of itself, an idea common in every close reading of literature. The game was developed in order to "explore and elaborate significant features that constitute the discourse of this field and/or the work…as a way to uncover latent texts within this field and/or the work itself" (219). Their goal was to utilize digital spaces to create a new way of producing critical discourse about texts and critical self-reflection, and to "make explicit the assumptions about critical practice" (217). Played by two or more users, each user assumed a character from an extant text and produced their own text as if they were that character; for example, Rebecca from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*.

The first "move" was the creation of a text by the character. The second player would then respond to the first in the mode of the character they had chosen. Additionally, each player kept a short set of materials indicating their rationale for the character, much as one would keep for a *Dungeons and Dragons* character. For example, Jerome McGann produced a letter by a fictional character in 1882 in response to Gabriel Rosetti's "Goblin Market." He then describes his rationale for the move: "From the first move I intended to incorporate as much of the material developed by the other players as I could imagine my way with. The story-in-letters is the story of two contrasting views of poetry: one that argues poetry is a discourse in which discrete things are made in finished forms ("the goblin"); the other that it is an endlessly dynamic field, forever generative as long as generative power exists ("the sun")." (Np) (accessed 03/25/15).

What McGann and Drucker were doing was working with the kind of transmedial world described by Klastrup and Tosca, essentially, like so many other non-academic authors, researchers at the UVA Scholar's Lab replicated the basic procedures of fanfiction. McGann describes the IVANHOE play as critical work that intervenes in and reorganizes a "discourse field - a given dataset of visual and textual artifacts that is the initial play environment" (225). IVANHOE cannot be played alone; it is designed for collaboration because a player's move depends upon the interpretation of their work by another person. Together McGann, Drucker, and others created journal entries, letters, shopping lists, and editorials for their moves. McGann envisioned later extending the game space in which the computer intervened in the moves, becoming its own third character, but as we can see in IVANHOE and in fanfiction, the computer is operating on the creation of texts already in several different ways. Writing the various texts that were created for the game and playing the game itself would be incredibly difficult in another format. IVANHOE was designed to be played in a network. It relies on the feedback, the pushback, of other players to be effective. Because of this need for a network of users, when IVANHOE, like Storyspace had before, struggled with distribution it was shut down from 2010-2013 due to lack of players and communities. When the internet caught up with UVA's research, IVANHOE was re-released in 2013 as a Wordpress theme.

The current description of IVANHOE says:

> This WP Theme allows teachers to convert WordPress, already often used in the classroom, into an exciting environment where students can manipulate and play with a cultural object. Start by inserting a piece of art, a song, a literary text, or

even by designating a period of time; ask your students or collaborators to create "roles" from which to comment or add new material; then let them play, using our version of WP's easy blogging interface. See classic stories, movies, artworks, or traditions transform as players collaboratively and creatively react to them within the Ivanhoe Game WP Theme. (Np)

The introduction for the game includes the following descriptions:

10. Played in what was essentially an electronically enhanced paper-space, these iterations were most successful in the ways they exposed the critical and interpretive power of performance-based acts of textual invention. They supplied us with useful information about how to construct an initial IVANHOE design for studying traditional text-based materials.

14. IVANHOE is not like a "creative writing workshop," however. Its textual transformations get executed in a frame of reference focused on the significance of the changes in relation to the originary textual field and the changes that one's collaborating agents make to that field. The presence of the initial state of the text(s) is always preserved because the point of IVANHOE is to study that field of relations as it provokes or licenses its readers to reimagine its implications and textual possibilities.

> 17. IVANHOE works by encouraging players to work with a designated textual work and its sources, variations, versions, and other materials relevant to the history and production of the text. At a basic level, this will encourage such activity as the comparison of an illustrated version of a classic work to a text-only edition, or a facsimile manuscript to a printed edition. Students will be introduced to the concepts of bibliographical studies and to theoretical issues in textual interpretation without having to first engage with a technical vocabulary. IVANHOE allows them to enact the principles of comparison and critical analysis that are essential to the Humanities and social sciences where informed qualitative judgments are crucial. Collaborative, peer-exchange models of engagement will encourage cooperative development of analytical skills in reading and comprehension and appreciation of individual points of view in writing. IVANHOE promotes curricular dependence on creative, synthetic practices and engagement with primary materials that have traditionally been inaccessible in classrooms.

In other words, IVANHOE is identified as a tool, best used in a collaborative setting, that helps readers critically analyze a text or set of texts. IVANHOE builds networks in two ways. First, it is designed to build networks of meaning, in very material and concrete ways, through the artifacts and maps produced in game play. Second, it develops communities around those moves, players who respond to each other's work through increasingly detailed and intertextual responses, who understand the logic behind the different responses and perspectives offered by their compatriots. This same kind of

intertextual network building operates on a much larger scale in fandoms and fanfiction communities. Rather than restricting the network to just a few players, however, fandoms allow for networks that continually become deeper and more expansive.

IVANHOE offers an additional way of looking at fanfiction. In describing IVANHOE, McGann, echoing Manovich's approach to digital texts, emphasizes "the observer's active participation" in the process, although the "observer" here is a reader of the moves for the game (231). IVANHOE, McGann says, is a game that creates a discourse field that allows for interpretations of texts that are "emergent, reappearing in a surprising series of deformations and transformations" the point of which isn't winning or getting to "essential meanings and final interpretations" but to create areas of even more inquiry (231).

But what he doesn't say is that the kind of work IVANHOE creates is *reading*. The prompting and interactivity of IVANHOE meant that for McGann, it remains a game, and literature after the world wide web looks much as it did before, only modified by careful digital appendages. Creating shopping lists, letters, or journal entries from a character's point of view is precisely the kind of writing done in fanfiction, although it might be called Mary Sue fic – a less complicated genre of fic. Because of their simplicity, these kinds of works are sometimes made as fanart for more complex fics. But Mary Sues are still real and important, and so are the letters the IVANHOE players sent to each other's characters. Through the creation of these works, players interrogated the potential meanings in the texts they were studying, and created a space where they could easily build their own critical inquiries into the materials. The lack of non-player interactivity and the non-visual or non-animated restrictions of the game were eventually seen as a

limitation, as we can see through the defensive language used in the descriptions of the Wordpress version of IVANHOE. But it was actually a benefit.

In recalling her own play and use of the game, Bethany Nowviskie points to one of the journal entries she created for her character, written in plain text, and says: "I must confess — as much as I loved the design process in all its stages — that I haven't played a really *good* game of Ivanhoe since we moved away from the more prosy and simple interfaces of the *Turn of the Screw* game…" ("Sketching Ivanhoe," np).There is something different about using plain language for this kind of work; the language and the material conditions used to evoke the stories works on us. What Nowviskie might be experiencing, at least in part, is the pull toward networked language. To think about it via Heidegger, the inherent potential of the material conditions of the play bring forth and continually act upon the player.

Moreover, what isn't being articulated in the descriptions of the game and the play is that the "electronically enhanced paper" environment *can* reflect and enact the practices and procedures of digital environments. In IVANHOE we see the direct evidence of the machine working on us and our ideas of language and narrative - and therefore ourselves. As in fic, the material conditions of play in IVANHOE force the user to focus on the movement between reference points, the lexical pieces of canon I described in chapter two, and the new pieces they are creating, while simultaneously removing the need to remember what that connection looked like; the discursive connection is (more or less) permanently held in digital space. In IVANHOE, this connection was created through the moves of each player. In fic, the connection is made visible through stories. Perhaps paradoxically, the invisible or conceptual links of fic, figured in plain text, bring forth

ongoing proof of their networks of meaning. In both of these environments, then, the focus is not on attaining a permanent goal, but the establishment of various and interesting ways to move through questions emerging from both the original texts and your colleagues' responses to them. They create process-based writing developed on an understanding of hyperlinking and critical inquiry.

What is especially interesting about the descriptions above are the ways in which the research teams describe what IVANHOE *isn't*. It isn't, they say, properly digital, it is "an electronically enhanced paper-space." Neither is it a "creative writing workshop," but rather a "frame of reference" that allows players to understand "the concepts of bibliographical studies" and "theoretical issues in textual interpretation" as well as "the principles of comparison and critical analysis" and to experience "[c]ollaborative, peer-exchange models of engagement [that] will encourage cooperative development of analytical skills in reading and comprehension and appreciation of individual points of view."[59] Through these descriptions, the research team seems to be separating IVANHOE from expressionist methodologies of writing instruction. IVANHOE only appears to be a place of creative writing, they say, but it really isn't.

This distancing move away from creative writing reflects the larger discourse surrounding composition and popular works, and indeed the larger scholarly community as a whole. Even in writing instruction, we are supposed to somehow maintain a veneer of objectivity. Inward-looking sentimentality is, the theory goes, unlikely to persuade others. As Thomas Newkirk argues, "the cultural capital we possess rests upon a capacity

[59] Interestingly, another group researchers and teachers using fanfiction in the classroom used similar language: "It is important to note that this unit is not reliant on the tools or specific communities identified within it:…though it *incorporates* fanfiction practices, it is not *about* 'doing' fanfiction." (McWilliams, et al, 2011 239)

to see through sentimentalism. In this regard we distance ourselves from popular culture in which sentimentality is a real force" (23). Again in these moves there is a division between theory and practice – some, if not most – of our most influential scholars work from their hearts, and from the belief that it is possible to change the world through teaching writing and critical thinking. But in first year composition, we primarily study non-fiction texts, which are viewed as more broadly public texts. As teachers, these works are texts we can analyze and teach our students to analyze. I'll discuss the fear of sentimentality in academic work more later on, but I mention it now because the IVANHOE creators are trying to dissuade users (or administrators) from asking questions about its value. Unsurprisingly, as many of the game moves are, in fact, fanfiction, these are also questions aimed at fic and fannish creators. "Is it *really* literature?" "It can't actually be critical!" and, certainly, "how is this rhetorical?". But there is little difference between the engaging letters written in IVANHOE and the ways in which Lex Luthor reflects upon the state of his relationship with Clark Kent in astolat's "Moving On."

These questions about the usefulness of the game reflect anxiety about authority within the field. In part, this is simply because we've been having the "can you use literature in rhetoric and composition" debate for the last forty years. IVANHOE, and other types of fanfiction allow for serious critical engagement with texts without a "technical vocabulary" (np). When considering flat text alongside critical multimodal pieces, can we say that a sonic argument has a more technical vocabulary than an alphabetic transformative work, even if that work is fiction?

IVANHOE's framing as a rhetorical tool that can help create a critical understanding of texts, social movements, or time periods also takes us back to the questions Rhodes

and Alexander posed in *On Multimodality*: when is a work a description or summary of another, and when is it a commentary on another work? And how do we tell which it is, especially when it is occurring across mediums? Throughout this dissertation I use the term "transformative work," and I've done so rather advisedly.[60] Although "transformative work" has contested history and somewhat shaky reputation in many fan communities, I use it because I firmly believe that fanfiction and other fan works are critical and inherently rhetorical. The definition as it is used in fandom is slightly different than the common usage in rhetoric and composition, where transformation is often defined as Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss put it in 2009:

> In our day, writing often requires composers to draw upon multiple modes of meaning-making. Computers and robust networks allow writers to choreograph audio, video, other visual elements, text, and more. Writers engage in taking the old and making new. Appropriating words and images. Taking pieces, splicing ideas, compiling fragments. Transforming existing work. Transformation occurs when the rhetor delivers a text into a new context; collects the text with others to make a new compilation; adds additional materials to the text; and more. (np)

Their definition, like many others, relies on cutting and pasting, and is focused on aural and visual works. In the media spaces they describe, authors are deliberately writing chunks of text that are designed to be picked up piecemeal and redistributed into different mediums; so a press release offers several chunks that can easily be cut and pasted into

[60] The term itself can inspire knee-jerk negative reactions in some fannish communities, especially those who feel they have been exploited by aca-fans.

headlines, or a tweet, and similarly celebrities and politicians are trained to speak in news bites, so their messages can be delivered to the highest number of consumers.

But in fannish spaces the fragments they mention can become very small indeed. "Transformative" is a key term in United States copyright law as established by the Supreme Court. While the primary guidelines for Fair Use were established in 1976, "transformative" became a defining value of Fair Use in the 1994 case *Campbell vs Acuff-Rose*. Justice Souter ruled in favor of 2 Live Crew, who had created a parody version of Roy Orbison's popular song "Pretty Woman," stating that "the inquiry focuses on whether the new work merely supersedes the objects of the original creation, or whether and to what extent it is controversially 'transformative,' altering the original with new expression, meaning, or message. The more transformative the new work, the less will be the significance of other factors, like commercialism, that may weigh against a finding of fair use" (np). In this case and others, transformative works were set in opposition to derivative works. 2 Live Crew's "Pretty Woman" points out that Roy Orbison's pop hit was probably about prostitution, or, at best, furthered rape culture, and through its performance makes the audience aware of the ways race impacts those national conversations. "More transformative" is of course a matter of opinion, so the general answer is that the Supreme Court has ruled that transformative works are like pornography - you know it when you see it.

Transformative works are placed in opposition to "derivative works." According to United States copyright law, "A "derivative work" is a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment,

condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted." (Np) Fanworks are frequently seen as derivative works, and have long been subject to lawsuits by major corporations, with even minor fan works coming under attack. As Ursula LeGuinn says in her FAQ "As for anybody publishing any story "derived from" my stuff, I am absolutely opposed to it" (np). Lucasfilm was particularly vigorous in pursuing its claims against fans. The relationship between fanworks and copyright law is longstanding and contentious, and there isn't space to describe it fully. But, for example, in 2012, the file hosting and sharing site began taking down podfic in response to copyright claims. As Abigail Derecho notes, the primary dispute surrounding fanworks is one of authority and intent that is familiar to literary scholars; older schools of thought believed that interpreting texts correctly meant deciphering an authors intentions and meanings, while more recent scholarship relies on a reader's own interpretation of a work combined with social/historical analysis. In this instance, popular culture has lagged behind English scholarship by several decades, as creators like LeGuinn, Anne Rice, George Lucas, and many others have demonstrated.

In 2007, in response to growing numbers of DMCA takedowns and Cease and Desist letters in fannish communities, a small group of fans created The Organization for Transformative Works.[61] Perhaps best known for *The Archive of Our Own*, the OTW is a completely volunteer-run non-profit organization. It hosts fan archives, a fannish encyclopedia, a scholarly journal, and (most importantly for this section) has a legal team that continually works for the legitimacy of fan creations. The OTW addresses the nature of transformative works on its FAQ page:

[61] http://transformativeworks.org/

> What do you mean by a transformative work?
>
> A transformative work takes something extant and turns it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression.
>
> Transformative works include but are not limited to fanfiction, real person fiction, fan vids, and fan art. The OTW is interested in all kinds of transformative works, but our priority will be to support and defend the types of works hosted in our archive, and the fans who create them. (np)

Still, seeing what is transformative and what is derivative can be fairly straightforward, and fanworks are an ongoing proving ground for these deliberations. By the OTW's interpretation, the student-made video described in the introduction to this chapter counts as a transformative, and therefore critical, form of response, especially if it focused on one particular aspect of the book. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is considered to be a legal parody, even though the primary change in the text was simply to add zombies as a primary motivator for character's actions. In comparison to that, the student-made video would likely be more transformative. Artifacts that appear in IVANHOE*,* like the shopping list made for the character, are transformative works; they take everything the creator knows about the character and their in-universe environment and builds a new artifact around it. Telling the story from the point of view of another character is also a transformative work.

When one work is responding to another, it is already in conversation with the earlier text(s) and its creator(s). We tend to think of networks as nodes connected by lines, and

these in contrast to hierarchies. These can be useful dichotomies for thinking through ideas, but as Michael Joyce said about the development of Storyspace, hierarchies and networks are rarely so clearly separate, and perhaps especially less separate in digital environments. Instead, as Collin Brooke notes, networks emerge through preferential attachment. That is, they intensify through use: social movements emerge through consistent hashtagging, we use scholars we've already heard of in our own essays. He continues this a bit further by saying networks are more than backdrops for us, or metaphors that help us think through ideas, they are fundamental to our idea of rhetoric. Citing Bruno Latour's theory that we shouldn't confuse our medium and our message - "what circulates when everything is in place cannot be confused with the setups that make circulation possible," Brooke says that all of the things that go into making the circulating material are part of the same network. That is, rhetoric is based in tropes. And tropes change discourse as well as meaning; they represent different kinds of modalities. (Np)I'd like to suggest that Brooke's thinking of networks as tropic and fundamental to the study of rhetoric helps us think through the role of alphabetic texts in networked environments.

Different kinds of networks do different kind of work, changing and growing in different ways. Citation, Brooke says, is world-building, network-building (np). The entropic value of networks is based on their structure: fast moving networks, like the ALS ice bucket challenge in summer 2014, have high entropy, while larger, more ordered networks have low entropy. I said earlier that fanfiction relies on conceptual links for its processes. As a system, fanfiction's networks of ideas are constantly adding to its own quickly-growing entropy. Intense citation leads to "the productive introduction of

disorder into the network of citations." (Kendall, summarizing neatly). The more texts there are, the more potential there is for disruption and change. These links, this ongoing gesture toward another site of potential work, means that fanfiction's entropy, its potential for growth, is itself always growing. This accounts for the incredible growth of fanfiction and fanfiction communities over the last several years, as digital environments reward citation.

4. Invention: perpetual generation (and failure)

The self-perpetuating nature of fanfiction texts, which results from the materiality of flat text in digital environments, means that invention is built into the system, into the network. In this section, I will describe another way citation occurs in fic, and what happens when those citations begin to bend and blend into each other. As I described in the introduction, many people have said fanfiction reflects an oral tradition; the heavy reliance on epithets and tropes makes this clear. Just as we know about Homer's rosy fingertips of Dawn, so too we know Spock's eyebrow. However, what makes fanfiction unique is that unlike most other forms of writing, it frequently relies on changing not only the story being told, but the media/um through which it is told.

Fanfiction emerges through a peculiarly circular route. A significant amount of fic is written about characters and celebrities in film and television. Utilizing oral methods of communication, it transforms visual and aural artifacts into flat text form. In addition to being aware of the multiple layers of translation and transformation occurring in the genre, fanfiction provides one avenue to begin to think through the sensory and gestural aspects of rhetoric. Digital rhetoric studies are committed to studying the way we make meaning through visual and aural mediation, but understanding how users create those meanings is complex and still under-theorized. By reintroducing and reinforcing varying aspects of sensory information, fanfiction is very good at helping us understand the embodied aspects of flat texts. In addition, the multiple layers of sensory experience provide readers with an aesthetic experience, an approach Aimee Knight says is helpful for composition studies because it "shifts the emphasis from objects (texts, artifacts) to

audience perception and meaning making with and through those objects" (153). Fic is deeply embodied: bodies are at the heart of fanfiction, and the bodies of its characters are described both experientially (how characters experience their own bodies) and representationally (how those bodies are perceived by other characters and by readers). Fanfiction writers must translate images and voices into text, and readers must translate that text back into the sounds and movements of bodies. All of these translations produce a series of intensely mediated bodies: *remixed* bodies that both amplify and modify the bodies, gestures, and actions originally represented onscreen. These mediations, and the possibility for an infinite series of both complementary and contradictory mediations, create a pattern that constantly expands, creating a productive tension between creators and audiences.[62]

Another way to think about the persistence of growth in fanfiction is to look at it through what Jeff Rice calls the choral logic of cool media. Rice develops his idea of cool media through Gregory Ulmer's definition of chora and Marshall McLuhan's theory of cool media. Ulmer's definition of chora is based on the idea that hyperlinks necessarily lead to a broad network of ideas that create connected topoi for arguments; a spatial, ever-moving form of reasoning that is dramatically different than the linearity demanded by print texts. Marshall McLuhan, of course, argued that "hot" media like radios have low levels of audience participation, while telephones and other "cool" media have high levels of audience/actor participation. Rice extends this topoi across the rest of the internet, saying that hyperlinks themselves change the way users create arguments.

[62] These flat text forms are then themselves the generators of oral retellings of the story (podfic), aural complements of fan mixes, and frequently, a return to visual artifacts through fan art. And so the very systems of fanfiction are always encouraging building and rebuilding.

Because hyperlinks are always gesturing to other spaces, they create a network of ideas around a single concept. That is, the web operates on a choral logic, and this changes the way users react to information. What this change means is that in web spaces, instead of understanding a term as having a particular meaning, users often have to confront the multiple available meanings that occur when terms are juxtaposed against all other meanings and contexts. Rice says that "While all reading and writing activities demand participation to some extent, writing multiple meanings simultaneously generates a method more conducive to digital culture, which is itself…constructed out of multiple texts and meanings that often overlap and interlink" (*Rhetoric of Cool* 35). Users' always-present knowledge of the open-endedness of the web grounds our reading and writing practices; even the spatial metaphors we use to negotiate digital spaces encourage writers and readers to consider many definitions of and links between ideas at once; we are always going somewhere else when we are online. And so the multiplicity of meaning users expect has the result of a multiplicity of texts always generating more texts. This ongoing generation means that at a material level, fanfiction is dialectical, always occurring in conversation with others, and always pushing the conversation forward. Theories of *chora* are a helpful lens for re-examinations of alphabetic text in digital environments, because, as Sidney Dobrin recently asserted, *chora* allows us to focus on work that "exists in the moment prior to space becoming place, the moment before arrangement and meaning" (40), the kind of work widely evident in digital writing from wikis to standard hyperlinks to fanfiction. Similarly, John Bryant argues that

> The very nature of writing, the creative process, and shifting intentionality, as well as the powerful social forces that occasion translation, adaptation, and censorship among readers–in short, the facts of revision, publication, and reception–urge us to recognize that the only 'definitive text' is a multiplicity of texts, or rather, the fluid text.(2)

These readings of texts are familiar to anyone who has studied the instability of language itself, and many of us agree this focus on becoming – on the process of becoming – grounds composition scholarship. Pragmatically, however, this focus can lead to frustration. Even professionals sometimes couch the never-ending process of becoming in terms of error and suffering. In looking at a collection of digital videos, Daniel Anderson and Jentery Sayers say that the deep intertextuality and material convergence apparent in them pushes readers to read the text as layered, as occupying multiple spaces at once, and remind us that even Bryant said these distances and process of holding multiple ideas in places so that we can move between them can be "painful pleasures" (83). Fanfiction offers one way through this frustration. It is simultaneously deeply layered, always intertexual, and always only one piece of a never-ending process of critical discovery. But the stories themselves end, giving users certain closure. This certainty, in addition to the links and references being easily apparent through flat texts, makes students more comfortable with the idea of possibility. In his examination of glitch work as rhetoric, Casey Boyle says that glitch - the reification of (machine-based) error- offers the possibility to "pay attention to *in-betweens*, especially the mediation work of interfaces and infrastructures, that they help us understand "how those *in-betweens* help configure

our personal, academic, and civic practices (13). Fanfiction is the structure of the *in-betweens* laid bare.

5. Common problems

Slowly but surely, it is becoming no less problematic to be a fan of *The Lord of the Rings* than it is to be a fan of a sports team. And yet these divisions do still exist, and can be particularly difficult to overcome in academic settings. As more and more composition courses are taught by adjunct labor, and tenure becomes more difficult to get and retain rhetoric and digital rhetoric and composition instructors can already find themselves having to argue for the necessity of the very existence of their programs - adding in content that can be viewed as "non-serious" or problematic can be a struggle when a career or job feels tenuous. Here I'll describe some obstacles that can occur in using fanfiction, and how they can be circumnavigated. These obstacles can briefly summarized as technological, cultural, and academic, although there is always overlap between these.

Teaching fanfiction (in its current state) has its own set of technical difficulties. Like all digital humanities work, it requires as Peter Selber points out in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, institutional, departmental, curricular, pedagogical, and technical know-how. In this section I will attempt to get around some of these problems, answering them as questions I have encountered at conferences.

Obstacle: plagiarism - the ghost in the room

There are a multitude of reasons fanfiction hasn't been more widely studied, but one of the primary concerns of rhetoric and composition scholars from very early on in digital studies was plagiarism of texts, particularly scholarly papers, and the related problem of ongoing legal shifts concerning online property rights of different materials. Talking about remix means talking about plagiarism. Rebecca Moore Howard, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Stuart Selber, Daniel Anderson, Alex Reid, Adam Banks, and others in the discipline have taken on the idea of plagiarism in developing multimedia projects that are based in collage, pastiche, and sampling, but text-based projects are still sometimes subject to a nearly overwhelming concern about plagiarism. This concern is ongoing. *Computers and Composition* has published 86 articles on plagiarism and copyright, including: Vie 2013, Meese 2010, Vee 2010, Johnson-Eilola and Selber 2007, Howard 2007, and DeVoss and Rosati 2002.[63] In general, these articles are critical of the evolving laws and social mores that are appearing around digital culture even within the academy and writing centers. They largely echo the now nearly three-decades old complaint of Joan Latchaw and Jeffrey Galin, who in their 1998 essay in that same journal, describe the difficulties of explaining new writing experiences to publishers:

> The functions of authors, however, as demonstrated in Web culture, are shifting dramatically, thereby enabling new functions to emerge. With interdisciplinary studies, merging or shared discourses, and social construction of disciplinary knowledge, materials, information, and individual texts cannot always be classified by author. Nor is the information material (as in "objects of appropriation"), because

[63] In 1998 both *Computers and Composition* and *Kairos* ran special issues on copyright, which also deserve some acknowledgment here.

> it is continually revised, appropriated, borrowed; therefore, it cannot be owned in the same sense as a print product. It is sometimes impossible to determine what is contributed by particular individuals, that is, in the creation of multiauthored hypertexts. Thus, the author-function is not a universal constant over time or disciplines. (152)

The internet, these articles explain, reverts the idea of ownership, authorship, and composition to something more like its pre-18th century state. But the existence of these articles proves the ongoing concern within the field and within larger cultural contexts about plagiarism. My own large state university just designed a syllabus to be used by all of the graduate student FYC instructors that includes four pages of anti-plagiarism instruction within the first third of the text - that is, near the top, where students and instructors will be unable to miss it. This anxiety has a long history in English and Rhetoric. We need look no further than Eliot's extensive notes on *The Waste Land* to understand how it has been expressed. As Jonathan Lethem points out, when readers who are unfamiliar with poetry are confronted with the allusion to Spenser in line 176, "Two responses are possible: grant the line to Eliot, or later discover the source and understand the line as plagiarism….the notes [Eliot] so carefully added to *The Waste Land* can be read as a symptom of modernism's contamination anxiety" (30). Rhetoric and remix studies of visual and aural texts have largely moved beyond the idea of contamination.

But in text based, and particularly flat-text based areas, the anxiety is still present. Despite the turn toward audio and visual work, the focus in rhetoric and composition is often still the production of a final paper, with an individual author. But digital

environments offer many viable alternatives to a final paper, and even to alternative ideas about individual authorship. This kind of writing and reading is not only dispersed, it is collaborative, resisting the idea of individual authorship. This can be alarming for some, as the widespread use of services like Turnitin can attest. But it is impossible to transform something without being aware that the other thing exists. This kind of work is not remediation, not absorption, but instead fosters a more critical awareness of the material each creator is working with. That is, it increases citation, rather than decreases it.

I want to make another distinction between plagiarism and the kind of work that occurs in fanfiction: while it may seem reductive to point out, in aural texts the referenced or transformed musical phrasing isn't visually present in the way hyperlinks or traditional citations might be. Instead, it is implied that a listener will know it the references, that they will be or already is part of a larger conversation. The skill of these creators is largely measured on what they do with extent texts. And yet when we look at flat text, especially in educational settings, this kind of referent is frequently considered plagiarism; only scholars who have already proven their skill can gesture toward a particular scholar without explaining in depth why they are doing so (this gesturing, of course, also implies a particular audience). Although there are many articles on the difficulties of assessing video, plastic art, and musical projects, these kinds of work and their role in helping professors garner tenure, plagiarism and theft are not as worrisome. The general consensus seems to be that plagiarizing in these alternative formats is too arduous for academics, if not for P.Diddy.

What is particularly interesting about this concern regarding plagiarism is that, just as it is in music and art copyright law, it is a matter of definition, which of course varies

from community to community. The inherent materiality of every fic, as I said above, increases citation rather than developing tendencies toward plagiarism. Given the sheer number of fics and the diversity of creators, the average level of plagiarism within fandom itself is extraordinarily low, and when it occurs, especially on a large scale, the misbehaving party often becomes notorious.[64]. In addition to the description of author's notes I described in Chapter One, wherein fic creators say they aren't making any money, the POINT of fanfiction is to transform a thing into something different, something that comments on. So the idea of ownership over a text is complex. The author is (always) dead for fandom. The text exists to be played with. Taking or profiting from someone else's work outright is frowned upon. The primary offenders, actually, tend to be academics (which I'll discuss later on).

[64] See, for example, Cassandra Claire. http://fanlore.org/wiki/Cassandra_Claire

Obstacle: Institutional and Departmental

"We don't have computers. I asked my department if we could get time in any of the computer labs on campus, and they looked at me in shock, all wide eyes. 'Why would you need computers to teach English!?!,' they said. They just don't get it." - A professor at a Big State university who prefers to remain anonymous, at a large conference in 2013.

Even at my own so-called State Ivy, institutional support for the humanities is steadily weakening, and arguing for "specialized" topics or courses is increasingly difficult. At a departmental level, as the first epigraph for this chapter states, even many large schools do not understand how computers might be necessary for reading and writing well, viewing computers as fancy word processors rather than materials that have fundamentally changed our approach to texts. In this regard, fanfiction can help bridge this gap in understanding. The texts themselves, are (as described in chapter two) remarkably stable artifacts. This is helpful in two ways: first, that they do not require extensive technology support to maintain or analyze, and second, that they are therefore more familiar to 'outsiders' than texts like YouTube videos. And, like videos, while one video might leave, video genres are also quite stable - the political parody video has been widely available for some time and is likely to remain.[65] So too fanfiction. If your university allows or encourages any kind of digital work at all, particularly in rhetoric, you are likely to be able to teach fanfiction as digital literacy.

[65] It is telling that while there are calls for developing a "canon" of fics, this doesn't seem to be the case for digital media objects like videos, which is also worth noting. Why do we still have this desire to say "this" story is worth studying, or another isn't, when we don't require that same stability from other sorts of texts?

Obstacle: Curricular (Non-serious Texts)

In 2011, I faced a crowded classroom as I began the first day of my first self-designed rhetoric course. Teaching in the Digital Writing and Research Lab, I pulled the course website up on the screen at the front of the room and heard a small murmur go through the group. After we went through the basics of the syllabus and course expectations, I asked if there were questions, and an athletic student in the back raised his hand. "So," he said, pointing at the kitten meme on the screen "in this class we're going to be talking about LOLcats?". In fact we were, although only briefly. The course was The Rhetoric of Transformative Works, and we would be looking at a number of popular media texts. Although well out of fashion now, in 2011 Lolcats were elderly enough to be well-known, but not so old as to be out of reach for a broad audience. "Millions of Lolcats can't be wrong," I said. "Man," he replied, "I thought we were going to be studying things that mattered." He dropped the class.

Fast forward to 2013. I'm sitting in a circle of tables with another class, literature this time. A student starts to speak, hesitates, and then tentatively begins again. "So if *50 Shades of Grey* is so important, and it is internet-based literature, how come we aren't studying it in this class?" As an international best-seller, I'd drawn on its example several times throughout the term to indicate the cultural importance of what they might consider non-serious texts. Although my students were sometimes uncertain about the importance of narrative, they definitely understood the economic impact of popularity. I explained that my objection to the text wasn't about pornography, but rather that the novel

romanticizes abusive relationships, and while it was important, it wasn't how I wanted to spend my time. He nodded and sat back, satisfied with the answer.

I bring up these examples because they demonstrate two common problems in teaching "non-serious" texts. The first is that sometimes we have to prove to our students as well as the administrators of departments that the texts are worth studying at all. The second is that sometimes students are then confused as to how to decide which texts are relevant or worthy of study, or where their work might fit in with the rest of their education. While digital rhetorics keep pushing the boundaries of our studies outward in order to maintain relevance, there is sometimes a tendency for students to see these kinds of study as separate from the rest of their "real" work. This is of course in contrast to the work they do in other classes, which they can also consider to be separate from their "real" lives.

Obstacle: Pornography

This is quite a large discussion that will be necessarily foreshortened here due to space constraints. Again, there are two aspects and solutions to this obstacle.

1. Excessive interest in anything is often coded as deviant and therefore prurient, because a person who is out of control of one section of their life is likely to be out of control of another, or so popular logic goes. When combined with the association of computers with all forms of pornography and the idea that fanfiction is women's writing, it is easy to see how fanfiction might be considered deviant. With the growth of (non-sports) fan cultures as significant economic factors, this line of thinking is beginning to abate, but it is still present. In the wake of *50 Shades of Grey*, the idea that fanfiction is

purely smut has become even more pervasive than it was before. This is quite simply not true. However, much - if not most - fanfiction is not pornographic. A recent survey of *The Archive of Our Own* (admittedly a small archive, with just over 3 million texts) found that only about 18% of texts there were rated "explicit" (destinationtoast,np). This statistic is significant because unlike the fanfiction.net archive, *The Archive of Our Own* does not restrict explicit material (Wattpad, another major archive, has explicit material restrictions but they are not enforced and seem to be in place only for social factors). In other words, it is very easy to find fic that is not pornographic, as can be seen in the examples throughout this dissertation. A significant amount of fic is "gen," which means that a romantic relationship isn't even the focus of the story.[66]

2. In my opinion, teaching pornography should be a part of every digital rhetoric course, although certainly not the focus of every such course. This is simply because pornography is pervasive on the internet, and pedagogical silence about the commercialization of identity and censorship is irresponsible.

2.b. I have often been asked/told that while I, as a woman, can discuss pornography with seriousness and non-creepiness in the classroom, it might be far more difficult for (for example) a middle aged white man, who is by default already in a position of power. The answer to this is straightforward: don't be creepy. My own undergraduate concentration was in British Modernism, which is rife with sexual content. Context, as ever, is paramount.

[66] This may be in reaction to the dismissiveness of non-sexual relationships as they are depicted in popular genres.

Obstacle: Technical knowledge

The myth of the digital native is very popular, as are the accompanying stories that claim cell phones are separating children from the world. I teach at a large well-funded state school full of overachieving undergraduates and every semester I have students from the ages of 19-24 who have never created hyperlinks. Shannon Carter, in *The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and Basic Writing Instruction*, defines rhetorical dexterity as "a pedagogical approach that develops in students the ability to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one" (p.14). When we think about digital dexterity, availability of equipment and understanding of how to use it become quickly apparent. My current students can use YikYak, Facebook, and Snapchat, but they don't know how to insert hyperlinks because they don't need to use them. Most of them have never built a website, are familiar with WYSIWG, or code anything. Fanfiction is an easy introduction to what is sometimes called technical work, because it has a low bar of entry for technical availability and know-how, and yet requires a fairly sophisticated theoretical knowledge of internet norms. Students will often know what the norms for different communities are, but may never have articulated them. Fannish canons provide a structure they can easily recognize, and the strict genre rules are easily identified, so fanfiction can act as a throughway - not to "better" literature, but to improved understanding of delivery, style, and audience.

Obstacle: It's about ethics in online journalism

There are many ethical considerations to take into account when studying fannish works. On the one hand, a lot of fanfiction (and other fannish works) are publicly or semi-publicly available, and therefore legal to access and use. On the other hand, there is a difference between what is legal and what is ethical. Many fannish works are created with a limited audience in mind. Until very recently, fanworks were mostly accessed by people in the fandom(s). The intrusion of outside discussion can be very unpleasant for all parties involved. Two fairly recent and public occurrences may be helpful. In 2009, Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam, researchers from Boston University, conducted a survey about sexual activities and fantasies in fandom and fanfiction. They were careful to emphasize their scholarly credentials and their role as neuroscientists in advertising the survey. Although some fans were quick to criticize the survey, it was quite widespread and they received many responses, some of which were (unsurprisingly) from minors. When Boston University learned about the project, they released an official announcement stating the two men had not pursued IRB approval, and disassociated themselves from the work. This event became known within fandom as #SurveyFail. They eventually published their research in *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, which is offensive, sexist, misogynistic, and trans- and homophobic. It became a bestseller and is still cited in popular magazines.

More recently was the #TheoryofFicGate. In early 2015, popular fanfiction creator waldorph suddenly started getting comments on one of their fics that were sharply critical and hurtful. The first comment began with:

> First: Not to be rude but I have to ask, did you read what you have written? There are quite a few places at which the story is disjointed and seems like you thought about the interaction but neglected to type it out, as well as multiple areas where the grammar is negligent to say the least.

And went on in that tone for some time. It is clear from the comment above that waldorph was upset by this critical response to their fic, and all of the comments that followed, which maintained the tone of the first, and in fact they created a Tumblr post in response. waldorph replied to this comment on their fic with:

> Wow. First: yes, this is extremely rude, and you saying "not to be rude, but" doesn't make it less so, it just warned me that asshattery was to follow.
> Second: I don't know if you realize this, but I don't get paid to write these stories. I do them for fun, because I like fandom (for the most part) and this is my way of participating in a discussion of the text. Furthermore, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt and assume you don't know how damaging these comments can be. If I was just starting out in fandom and received this? I probably would have stopped. I didn't solicit your opinion, I have nothing that invites concrit in my author's notes, and general rule of thumb is that if that invitation isn't there, don't be a dick and leave it. Luckily this isn't one of the first things I've written, and I have years enough under my belt to let you fall off my shoulders, but I want you to seriously consider that you could damage someone else. Someone who might have gone on to write the greatest fic in a fandom yet to come might never post another fic because you couldn't

> hold back being a complete asshole in a nitpicking comment at them. And ending your comment with a "oh, but your characterizations were good enough that i finished it" doesn't read as a compliment.
>
> Third: If you really like being nit-picking, and this came from a place of well-meaning, just fantastically shittily-executed, maybe you should look into offering your betaing services for someone who's in the market. There are communities for that kind of thing. Try being productive, instead of tearing people down in the comments section. (np)

It eventually emerged that waldorph's fic, and several other author's, had been assigned for a fanfiction course that was taking place at Berkeley University called "The Theory of Fanfiction." The stated purpose of the course is:

> From the time of the ancient Greeks to the zines of the 1960's, fanfiction has grown into a vibrant and complicated literary subculture. This course will aim to answer the question, "Is fanfiction a valid literary genre in its own right?" It will explore the growth of prominent tropes in fanfiction, from gender swapping to de-aging, as well as the role of fanfiction as a vehicle of alternative sexuality and kink expression. Further, this course will investigate how modern fanfiction came to be what it is today, how it is still changing, and what it might look like in the future. (Np)

After more time had passed, it was discovered that it was a casual course that was itself taught by undergraduate instructors. Several other authors had similar experiences, as the instructors in the course had required students each leave fifty feedback posts on fic. What is especially telling about this interaction is that the teachers themselves self-identified as fans, and at least one of them had posted several fics to fanfiction.net.[67] I'm describing their misstep here not in any attempt to shame or punish them, but to demonstrate that even though their intentions were good, and they were fannishly adjacent to the fic being studied, they were disruptive. Although the comments waldorph received were unpleasant and would be inappropriate in nearly every forum, they would be significantly less offensive on fanfiction.net, where authors often ask for and expect critical feedback. On livejournal and dreamwidth, "concrit" is sometimes requested, but it is almost never requested on *The Archive of Our Own*.

These small examples point to some of the problems in studying fanfiction. Part of the dissonance comes from the variety of disciplinary approaches to fans and fannish practice. Henry Jenkins, who arguably brought fanfiction to widespread scholarly attention, comes from a Communications background, and so followed an ethnographic approach in *Textual Poachers* (1992), as did Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1991). This is still a common approach to fan studies, and it focuses scholarly work on fannish behavior and practices. The ongoing importance of this kind of work and the problems and difficulties it can incur are evident in the series of tweets emerging from the 2015 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference. In reporting on one of the fan studies panels:

[67] After the syllabus came to light, the instructor removed their fic from the internet.

> Mark Stewart: Aca-fandom encourages closeness; participant observation has encouraged critical distance. Poor obs creates fan/aca tension #SCMS15."
>
> KT Torrey: .@AMKustriz discussing how t odo/to teach participatory observation/"media anthropology" in fan studies #b21 #SCMS15 March 25 2015 11:21 am.
>
> Lori Morimoto: How can we apply longstanding conversations about ethics to FS uses of ethnography? Some research is quite problematic. #SCMS15 #fanstudies March 25 2015 11:25am
>
> Lori Morimoto: Perceptions of FS as (overly) self-reflexive, too 'affective', not distanced enough, too celebratory or complicit #SCMS15 #fanstudies March 25 2015 11:16am
>
> .@pbooth81: Do we study the fan or the fan text? // A great but still contentious distinction (and sometimes not helpful re:IRB) #scms15

Although citing only a few tweets from a much larger conversation is an under-representation, similar conversations emerged in the #PCAACA2015:

> KT Torrey: Burton brings up more questions of ethics in #fanstudies. This is clearly a conversation that ppl are jonseing for. #pcaaca15
>
> KT Torrey: Discussion of reflexivity in #fanstudies research; being open about ourselves abt our position within/without communities we study #pcaaca15

KT Torrey: As academics, how do we ethically engage with fandom? #fanstudies #pcaaca15

It is worth noting that most of the live-tweeting from the fan studies panels at both the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference and the PCA/ACA conference emerged from a small group of tweeters, but the consistency of the message seems important. The identity of researchers, and the ways those identities are played out in fannish and more public academic spaces, is still causing tension for both fans and scholars.

In addition to online unpleasantness, there are often real-world consequences for fan work creators when their work is brought into a more public light. In earlier years, an author or creator could generally rest easy knowing that there was a strong division between their public and private lives, their fan name and their "wallet name."[68] However, it has become much easier to link names and activities. While it is in theory the responsibility of fans to maintain their own divisions of spaces and lives, this is *much* easier in theory than in practice. It might be difficult to abandon a name and persona that one has been attached to for 15 years, for example, a name and activity log that was created when divisions, practices, and online activities were quite different. It isn't uncommon for a fan to use the same name for decades, so that it is in fact easier to maintain friendships and networks across multiple platforms. Fannish practice and

[68] I'm indebted to Allison Morris for this term. In previous years people might use "real world name" to indicate their public name, but this term implies that online activities and personas are less important than offline names and activities, which isn't the case at all. Wallet name means the name that one uses in public and professional circumstances/the one that is listed on a C.V. or resumé.

culture, then, dramatically impacts behaviors of even new fans who are just now creating their names and spaces.

This matters because fanfiction, while gaining popularity, is still widely derided. At a very basic level, reading an author's fanfiction might be akin to discovering your pastor's pornography. While most adults agree that sexual activity is normal, knowing their pastor is a furry[69] would dramatically impact the way some congregation members would receive their sermons. The secrets and stories we tell our friends are frequently not the stories we tell our employers, our religious advisers, or our grandmothers. What this means is that by teaching or studying just any fanfiction one might find on the internet, we can dramatically impact those creator's lives. Outing someone as a fan can often out their sexuality, psychological status, and daily practices. In the United States, these are factors that are heavily coded and guarded in almost every part of our lives. In all cases, it is important to remember that what is legal isn't always ethical. The Association of Internet Researchers has provided a helpful and publicly available guide of questions to consider, and the *Transformative Works and Cultures* journal has supplemented them with additional guidelines.[70]

So what does one do, then, when they want to study fannish works? The most straightforward method is to ask creators for permission. Many creators are happy to share their work. Another approach can be to study texts that are anonymous or have been orphaned. Orphaned works are those that used to have a creator's name attached to

[69] See: McKee, 2007.

[70] The AOIR guide is available here: http://ethics.aoir.org/index.php?title=Main_Page (accessed 03/25/15). The TWC guidelines are available here: http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions (accessed 03/25/15)

them, but that person has made every effort to delete the connection between their name and that work. These kinds of texts are available everywhere, in every fandom. Anonymous fan creations are frequently available in high turnover spaces like livejournal memes or comment fics. You can be fairly certain that these texts will not be connected to a wallet name in any way. When considering whether or not to use orphaned works, due diligence is in order.

Another approach is to use texts that are very public and have been very public for some time. For example, in my 2009-10 course "The Rhetoric of Transformative Works," I taught the fanvids "Women's Work," and "On the Prowl" without seeking the creator's permission because these vids were so widely available. The creators of "Women's Work" had been interviewed by *New York Magazine* and other journals, and allowed the OTW to use the vid in their official comment on the EFF's proposal for a DMCA exemption for fanworks; it was well-known that they had already chosen a certain level of publicity.[71] Additionally, they had made those decisions fairly recently, just in 2007-08. Beyond that, I knew the conversation my class had surrounding those works was unlikely to be published or archived, as it spanned only two class periods of a lower-level undergraduate course. Teaching only widely public works like this has its own set of problems; we run the risk of seeing fanworks or fandoms as monolithic, and of creating a too-insular academic community.

This careful approach might evoke the natural question of *why*? If fic authors can use other people's work for their own uses, why should researchers ask for permission from fic writers? The first reason is simply that professionally published creators of books,

[71] "02 December 2008." http://transformativeworks.org/fr/projects/vidtestsuite accessed 03/29/15

music, and films have released their work into the wild. As we're widely agreed that the author is dead, there's nothing keeping readers or viewers from imagining their own versions of events. The second reason is the distribution of power and money. As I discussed in chapter one, fic authors are usually careful to attach disclaimers to their fic[72] noting that the characters and images aren't their own. While pull to publish works are becoming more common, it certainly isn't standard practice. Most fic authors are playing with those characters for reasons of their own - if and when they want to write original characters, they do. So fandom is usually not wanting exterior profits or rewards from their work. When researchers go into fan works, however, and publish articles about fannish practices or works, we are directly profiting from the labor of the people we are researching. We are hoping to gain some kind of profit, whether it is through reputation or money. My own career - and my Phd - rest upon the works of others, and these people have not volunteered to be research subjects, or asked for their work to be made public. The power differential is in our favor in these cases, and so the onus is on us to be polite about it.

[72] It might be worth noting that as fic is becoming a more and more public activity, this practice is abating. See especially tumblr fics.

Conclusion: +1

What isn't included in this dissertation is legion. Fanfiction and other fanworks are an area of digital texts that are understudied, and so my primary focus has been to begin to sketch out the basic structures of fanfiction in particular and how they can be useful for digital rhetoric studies. In this section I will mention just a few of the possible avenues for further research.

Like most fannish scholarship, the scope of this dissertation research is very focused, and emerges from a western media perspective on fandom and fannish writing practices. The texts used in this dissertation are exclusively in English, and come from LiveJournal, Dreamwidth, *The Archive of Our Own*, and Fanfiction.net. These are not representative of all of fandom, western media fandoms, or even fanfiction written in English. Other potential sources of texts for extensions of this kind of research could come from Tumblr or Wattpad, which have similar foundations but varying interpretations of the practices as they're demonstrated in the texts I've selected. This is part of an ongoing problem. Because fannish texts cross so many boundaries – between public and private work, identities, and authorities, it seems that in general adding large cultural differences has so far been too difficult outside of second language learner research (see Jwa and Black, mentioned earlier). In other fields such as Communications, Education, Law, and Media Studies, however, fannish work has long been of interest.[73] It may be that Rhetoric's recent turn through embodiment as an important kind of

[73] For nearly all of the 1990s and early 2000s, *The Harvard Law Review* was a primary source of scholarship on fannish practices due to the ongoing legal debates about copyright.

materiality and into a new interest in affect will allow further use of and collaboration with this kind of research.

The scope of this dissertation is further constrained by primarily relying on readings of fanfiction and other digital media found within resources that have already passed through assorted academic gatekeeping structures. It could be very usefully extended by engaging more texts that perform the same kind of challenge to authority that fanfiction itself does. Books like Jamison's *fic,* which includes essays from fanfiction writers, the public figures they write about, and media directors and showrunners have begun this process of breaking down the barriers of academic and public scholarship and knowledge-building. Lori Morimoto has recently developed the FanMetaReader site, which curates fandom's own reflection on its reading, writing, and consumption practices. The site builds on the even older Metafandom LiveJournal community, which hosted fan meta from 2005-2011, and which itself was founded on even older fannish traditions of self-examination and scholarship. (It should be noted that fandom is rife with professionally-trained academics, whether they self-identify as aca-fen or not. A tendency to become deeply involved in the minutia of a subject and create complementary texts examining all potential iterations and boundaries of and then expanding upon them tends to be the result of a particular temperament.)

Despite this impulse, transference of meta on fannish linguistic and network development has rarely made the move from inside fandom to digital scholarship. While there are fannish primers for nearly all of the common tropes, the big data research now available through sites like *The Archive of Our Own* is just beginning. How can we develop theories of networked language and attraction of the sort Collin Brooke suggests

given these kinds of corpuses? How can we track reactions to cultural events through language as it is used in fic?

And although popular perception of fanfiction is that it is generally smut, this project has only been able to gesture towards the bodies that occupy these kinds of digital spaces. For language research, fanfiction can be particularly intriguing. The always reaching toward the other, always-in-process aspect of fanfiction can lead to interesting destinations. It is difficult not to think of fanfiction's eternal iterations through a classical post-structuralist lens, as a kind of always parasitic language. As Derrida says, "iterability makes possible idealization…while at the same time limiting the idealization it makes possible, *broaching* it and *breeching* it at once" (61, original emphasis). That is, it is itself and something else at the same time. Derrida argues, contra Searle, that because of "non-serious" language, there is no fully aware speaker, no fully aware receiver, no pure speech, and no total context. What all of this means is that dehiscience is both liberating and destructive, a new production that pulls at the center of an idea, ripping it apart, which sounds very much like the primary function of fanfiction. And that it occurs most often through the depiction of transforming bodies and bodies that have been transformed from visual work to linguistic work emphasizes the materiality and destabilization of texts.

Perhaps because of this embodied aspect of fic, a wide range of research on fandom, fanfiction, fanvids, fanart, and fan studies itself comes from a media studies perspective. In this group, Matt Hill's *Fan Cultures* (2002) and Paul Booth's *Digital Fandom* (2010) come closest to the rhetorical perspective I suggest here. But the conversations I described in chapter three, along with the development of more blended

work environments for rhetoricians, suggest that many of our conversations are beginning to overlap. For computers and writing researchers, fanfiction provides an interesting space to examine how flat text can effectively respond to and criticize visual and aural texts. Historically, academic work, especially long-form work, has primarily occurred in alphabetic-text or flat-text form. This is true even when we are responding to visual or aural texts. This tradition means that flat text is frequently assumed to be itself non-transformative, that we are able to accurately summarize our thoughts in an alphabetic manner, which is itself problematic. The move toward responding to visual and aural texts with other visual and aural texts is very slow, as anyone who is going through a tenure process using digital works certainly knows.

As Kathleen Fitzpatrick points out in *Planned Obsolescence*, the incorporation of postmodernism into digital humanities work in a concrete way is complicated by our existing academic structures; it is simply very hard to get a tenure committee to recognize how a website, graph, or sound remix is important and difficult work for a humanities instructor. Introducing the kind of un-fixed text Fitzpatrick suggests as a representation of digital humanities work - wikis, blog post commentary, and ever-evolving "manuscript" texts-as part of a tenure file is almost unthinkable, as the committee would likely think it "unfinished" instead of un-fixed (67). What fanfiction methodologies offer, however, is a middle ground between the fixed documents like books and articles that are already widely accepted as markers of competency, and the never-ending texts Fitzpatrick proposes. If we can develop theories of literacy that incorporate multiplicities, we can better argue for digital humanities work in general. The fundamental practices that ground the fanfiction are important not only because fanfiction is a popular and

under-studied new media literacy, but because they offer us a way out of our current static argument.

Incorporating texts like fanfiction is one way to further the inevitable changes occurring in English departments in a productive way. Jennifer Glaser and Laura Micciche recently suggested that it is in our professional interests to "foreground writing relations among English Department members is a way "to organize collectives around an *activity* - writing- rather than around subject matter, methods, or theory" and "subverts the division between production, associated with rhetorical studies, and consumption, linked to literary studies, that has long plagued English department workings" (204-5). Fanfiction is a particularly useful text to use in rhetoric and comp classes because it *is* an interface, a text-based representation of rhetorical intent. It may seem counterintuitive to consider that one of the best ways to learn and work through the capabilities of new media formats is through what appears to be an older media/um. But as Pete Selber says, a student who is rhetorically literate will understand the persuasive, deliberative, reflective, and social action aspects of digital texts. That is, digital literacy requires the understanding of interface design as a "social rather than technical action," and the ways in which interfaces create persuasion through its use of "larger structures and forces (e.g. use contexts, ideology)" (147). Fanfiction is an important site to look at because of the way it reflects shifting attitudes toward narrative and composition.

Most importantly, fic forefronts not misunderstanding, but unknowingness – and developing comfort with, or even glee in, the level of ignorance that we face every day. Johndan Johnson-Eilola suggests that focusing on connections rather than on final products is political, that by focusing on a final, original product we promote the idea that

texts can be owned things. “This perspective makes literacy a condition bound up in gestures that are always potentially colonialist, especially in seeing citation as occupying or taking another’s space” (*Negative Spaces* 27). Fanfiction insists that texts are a way to get somewhere else, that nothing is fixed in space.

This is true, too, of this project. The fannish model is one of creating generative spaces. Over the course of writing this dissertation, I’ve become a product of the system, and the text in the preceding pages is perhaps more like fic than even I originally anticipated. So I don’t see it as any kind of finished product, but as a place to start other projects from.

Epilogue

I started working on this project shortly before I finished my Master's degree. And when I started working on fanfiction, incorporating it into my coursework, I heard "no" a lot. Almost all of my professors were extremely dubious about the value of this – to them – little known genre of literature. I heard that this kind of research wasn't useful for literature programs, because it was "just bad writing," that it wasn't serious enough, and really no-one in literature could do work with computer writing because it was too different, that there was really no way it could ever count as something "real." And so I switched (for this and a lot of other reasons) to rhetoric. And then I heard that fanfiction wasn't useful for rhetoric programs. It was too much like literature, it was too pornographic, it wasn't serious enough, it was juvenile.

My master's thesis – which only a few people read, or will ever read – is on James Joyce's incorporation of 17th century Italian philosophy through the Elisha/Elijah myths in *Ulysses*. I love Giambattista Vico, and I think James Joyce is clever and fun. I also can't tell the difference between *Ulysses* and the fanfiction I read every day, except that James Joyce is a dead white guy that no-one but me and a very tiny handful of other people enjoy reading. But certainly no-one was telling me that studying British Modernism was useless, or not serious enough for a literature program, or not interesting for rhetoric. And the more I heard no, the angrier I got. And Trish, who was kind enough to take me on as a student, finally sat me down one day and said "Tell me why you're angry."

I was angry because not looking at fanfiction is sexist. Not taking it seriously is sexist. And while feminism isn't fashionable, I'm still angry about it (anger isn't

fashionable, either). Fanfiction is widely viewed as women's writing, and women's work. And while other fannish practices like game development, cosplay, and fanart are read as masculine and therefore interesting and profitable, this writing is ignored and dismissed. And it is worth noting that those practices, coded as masculine, are generally replicating commercial products. Fanfiction twists and interrogates, bends commercial practices to its own will. This is why there is so much research on why ladies create fanfiction, of course. And the conclusion, going on thirty years now, is "because misogyny." But we can do better than that. Instead of just looking at this huge group of texts and saying "because misogyny," I'm suggesting that we look at the actual texts being created because misogyny. That we take at face value texts that overtly create a different world, that imagine there are different ways of being.

This is an informal education in writing, in literacy, and in feminism, that is being distributed around the world at tremendous speed and with the kind of accessibility and reach that a university can't hope to match. But a university could make itself a small part of that work.

Stories are swords.

Appendix

Below are two example course schedules incorporating fanfiction into English courses, both of which have been taught successfully (by the limited feedback available through students' formal and informal reporting). The first is a lower-level rhetoric course, and the second a lower-level literature survey course designed to introduce students to the English major.

309K: The Rhetoric of Transformative Works

Schedule:
Please note: assigned readings are listed on the day we will discuss them. Please read them prior to the class period.

Week 1 – What is this stuff?

08/25 – syllabus and course policy review, introduction to transformative works, "The Web is Using Us."

Week 2 – Introduction to rhetorical analysis
08/30- *Everything's an Argument* CH 1
09/01- *Everything's an Argument* CH 5, Authors against fan fiction: Rice "Important Message from Anne on Fan Fiction," Gabaldon, "The Dr. Who Connection" & "Fan Fiction Policy", Jasper Fforde Fan Fiction Policy.
A fan's response to the anti-fanfiction debate: ithiliana's anti-fanfic bingo card

Week 3- A preliminary framework
09/06- LABOR DAY. NO CLASS.
09/08- Selections from Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* and Eberly, *Citizen Critics*

Week 4 – Research Methods
09/13- Booth Ch.3, 4. In class - mindmaps
09/15- *Everything's an Argument* CH 18, 19, 20 (pay particular attention to 18).
09/18- Issue Papers due by noon.

Week 5- Meet (some of) the Players
09/20- *RIP*
In-class: one response to GirlTalk
09/22- *Jayne Eyre, The Eyre Affair*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Week 6- State your purpose

09/27- 1.1 Peer Review
09/29- 1.1 Due.
In class mindmaps and writing.

Week 7- Structuring arguments across media
10/4- *Everything's an Argument* CH 6, pp 370-378
Blogs: Jonathan, Courtney, Tyler, Kayla, Micaela, Ben S.
10/6 – 1.2 Due
Blogs: Emily, Samantha Toner, Meghan, Shereen, Trevor, Marcus, Becky

Week 8- Sound Systems
10/11- Selection from Miller, *Sound Unbound*
Blogs: Shereen, Rachael, Thomas, Tyler, Kayla, Micaela, Elise
10/12 – DJ Spooky 6-7:30pm Texas Union Ballroom
Blogs: Emily, Jonathan, Meghan, Trevor, Eric, Becky, Marcus
10/13- Sound revised.
Blogs: Samantha Toner, Jessica, Courtney, Micaela, Elise, Ben S.

Week 9- Sound & Image
10/18- Still images with sound- *Everything's an Argument* CH 14
Emily, Jonathan, Samantha T. Meghan, Trevor, Marcus
10/20- Video Remix: Gender & Genre: blog post and videos. Read the linked blog post and watch at least the following videos: "Women's Work," "On the Prowl." Read *Everything's an Argument* CH 8,9, skim CH10
Blogs: Shereen, Meghan, Trevor, Eric, Rachael, Jessica, Thomas

Week 10- Who's Saying What?
10/25- 2.1 Peer Review
Blogs: Emily, Meghan, Shereen, Trevor, Courtney, Tyler, Kayla
10/27 – 2.1 Due. In-class: Ringtone Workshop, Introduction to Unit 3
Blogs: Jonathan, Eric, Rachael, Marcus, Jessica, Thomas, Elise

Week 11- Say It Yourself
11/1 – In class: Ringtone Workshop
Blogs: Emily, Rachael, Becky, Jessica, Courtney, Kayla, Micaela
11/3- In class: Podcasting.
Blogs: Jonathan, Shereen, Eric, Thomas, Tyler, Elise
11/5: 2.2 Due by noon.

Week 12- Connecting Ideas
11/8- *Everything's and Argument* CH 7
Blogs: Samantha T., Meghan, Trevor, Becky, Marcus, Jessica, Courtney
11/10- In-class Workshop: Translation Projects. Bring three sources you anticipate using for your final project.
Blogs: Eric, Rachael, Thomas, Kayla, Micaela, Elise,

Week 13- Structuring Arguments
11/15- *Everything's An Argument* CH 11 & 12
Blogs: Jonathan, Samantha T., Shereen, Becky, Marcus, Jessica, Courtney
11/17- Annotated Bibliography Due.
Reading: "The Hunt for Gollum: tracking issues of fandom cultures," & "Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in *Supernatural* fan fiction."
Blogs: Eric, Tyler, Kayla, Micaela, Ben S., Dustin

Week 14- Putting an argument together
11/22 - Paper conferences
Blogs: Rachael, Thomas, Tyler, Elise, Ben S., Dustin
11/24 – Paper conferences
Blogs: Lauren, Ben S., Dustin

Week 15- Presentations
11/29 – 3.1 Peer Review
Blogs: Lauren, Ben S., Dustin
12/1 – LAST DAY OF CLASS.
3.1 DUE
3.2 Due Finals Day -Wednesday, December 8, by noon - no exceptions.

E314: Literature and the Internet

Preview Week
Thursday August 29 – Introductions

Week 1
September 03 –"The Fear of Fiction." *The Art of Immersion*, Frank Rose. "The Machine Stops," Edward Forester, part 1.
September 05 –Website signups. "The Machine Stops," Edward Forester. Part 2

Week 2
September 10 "As We May Think." *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vannemar Bush. "Amplified Marginalia." Basic library research.
September 12 – Library research part two. *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas, eds. (excerpts).

Week 3
September 17 –*Pale Fire*, Vladimir Nabokov. Introduction & Canto One.
September 19 –*Pale Fire*, Vladimir Nabokov. Commentary 73-117.

Week 4
September 24 –*Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson.
September 26 –*Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson.

Week 5
October 01- *Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson.
October 03- *Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson.

Week 6
October 08- *Electronic Literature: what is it?* Katherine Hayles. (Ch. 1).
October 10- *Afternoon*, Michael Joyce. *Hypertext*, George Landow (excerpt).

Week 7 – Learning Record Midterms Due
October 15 – - *Afternoon*, Michael Joyce. *Mechanisms*, Matt Kirschenbaum (excerpt).
October 17- HRC visit, Michael Joyce Archive.

Week 8
October 22- - *The Book After the Book*, Giselle Beiguelman. "Moving Through Me as I Move," Stephanie Strickland.
October 24- telescopic texts (assorted).

Week 9
October 29- Interactive Fiction, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen Aarseth (excerpt). *Second Person*, Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, eds. (excerpt).

October 31- *Mass Effect.* "Game Characters as Narrative Devices," Kristine Jorgenson.

Week 10
November 05- *Mass Effect.* "Game Characters as Narrative Devices," Kristine Jorgenson.
November 07– Research proposals – in class review.

Week 11
November 12- Fanfiction part 1."Harry Potter & the Eagle of Truthiness," Christine Morgan. *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins (excerpt).
November 14 – Research proposal due.

Week 12
November 19 – Fanfiction part 2, students to choose texts. "The Boy Who Lived Forever." *Time*, Lev Grossman. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, Karen Hellkeson and Kristina Busse, eds. (excerpt)
November 21 – presentations

Week 13
November 26 – presentations
November 28 – HOLIDAY NO CLASS

Week 14
December 03- Peer Review of Research paper
December 05 – Final class day. Presentations, cont. and evaluations

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